

Language, Culture and the Quest for Commensurability

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Abstract

The thesis examines the key concept of 'incommensurability' in relation to issues of language and culture as they became salient to developments in English as a school subject in the United Kingdom during the 1960s and 1970s. Beginning with an outline of the notion of incommensurability as it has been discussed within anthropology and philosophy within the 20th century, the thesis traces the roots of a complex of educational issues through their immediate intellectual and social background in the mass culture debates in the 1920s and 1930s and as they were developed in the post-war period. The thesis analyses the dominant themes within the paradigm shift towards a focus on language that took place in English education during the 1970s. This it does particularly with respect to their immediate intellectual heritage, paying special attention to the position of F. R. Leavis, Basil Bernstein, James Britton and M. A. K. Halliday in the intellectual field.

The thesis continues to pursue its analysis of ideas underlying issues in the period by tracing their origins and interrelations in the work of 18th century German philosophers of language, in particular, J. G. Hamann, J. G. Herder and W. von Humboldt. Within the work of these three writers, fundamental notions concerning the relation between language and thought and language and culture are found complexly explored. Some of the concepts generated by these thinkers came to have a direct and obvious influence on the thinking and writing of subsequent generations. However, this thesis attempts to clarify some of the contradictions and confusions evident within the domain of English education during the 1960s and 1970s with reference to less well known aspects of the work of these thinkers. The argument attempts to draw together the threads of its investigation particularly to shed light on the question of the extent to which communication/understanding across difference is achievable.

Contents

	page
Acknowledgements	4
Chapter One: Introduction: The Quest for Commensurability	5
Chapter Two: The Culture Debates in the 1920s and 1930s	18
Chapter Three: The Culture Debates in the 1950s and 1960s	45
Chapter Four: Tradition versus Modernity: English Education and the Fall of Sensibility	76
Chapter Five: The Paradigm Shift in English Education: The Language Debates and the Fate of Culture	107
Chapter Six: Unity in Diversity	153
Chapter Seven: The Key to the Labyrinth: the Language and Culture Debates Revisited	188
Bibliography	215

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Finally, I dedicate this thesis with all my heart to my parents, Eileen and Frank Inghilleri. Every word contained within it has been written for them and because of them.

Chapter One

Introduction: The Quest for Commensurability

This thesis examines the intellectual context of the relationship between developments within the English curriculum and the theories of language and culture that informed them. It focuses on the 1960s and 1970s period in English education in Britain, when this relationship became particularly relevant for educators and researchers involved in educational restructuring. The thesis examines the complex of ideas that informed debate over language and culture during this period and the political arena in which these ideas were played out. Its main objective in this regard is, therefore, to analyse the intellectual field of English education in the 1960s and 1970s, with special reference to theories of language and culture.

An extensive literature exists on developments in English teaching during this period. Some of the relevant studies include: (Inglis, 1969; 1971; Shayer, 1972; Mathieson, 1975; Abbs, 1980; Allen, 1980; Ball, 1982; Catt, 1988; Doyle, 1989; Goodson and Medway, 1990; Burgess and Martin, 1990; Burgess, 1988, 1993; Christie, 1993). All of these studies, in different ways, address English education in relation to social, political and/or cultural issues, both within the English classroom and in the wider British society. The majority focus on the period that is the concern of this thesis, a period historically marked as one in which the question of who education was supposed to serve and how, had become an especially important social, political and educational issue. Some of these studies offer a comprehensive historical account of English teaching, while others are concerned with curriculum development and classroom practice. This thesis, while

overlapping to some degree with this literature, addresses a different set of issues. Its specific objective is to articulate the complexities of the deep and enduring intellectual problems that informed—and sometimes failed to inform—debate over the relationships between culture, language and social class identity—and to identify and then attempt to clarify the confusions and contradictions that were generated in these debates.

There were at least two sources underlying the specific morphology of debate over curriculum innovation during this period. One was political, and had its own broader social causes. These are alluded to and addressed to some degree throughout the thesis, but mainly during the account given of the decades immediately preceding the 1960s and 1970s. The second was cultural/intellectual, that is, it lay in the apparent paradoxes and ramifications of some of the thorniest problems to have beset the western intellectual tradition, and in the specific form they took in the intellectual culture of the period. This complex of ideas—particularly those concerned with the relationship between thought and language—entered the field of educational debate during this period from a variety of disciplinary locations, including psychology, philosophy and literary studies. Their intellectual origins, however, can be found in the 18th century and earlier. Key problems evident in 20th century educational debates can be traced to the way in which these ideas were and were not explored in a period which had its own ‘politics of the intellectual field.’ In particular, the figure of Johann Gottfried Herder, writing in the 18th century to some extent against the grain of Kantian philosophy, yet during the period of its ascendancy, made important contributions—especially to formulations of concepts of culture, thought and language.

The complex of issues about the relationship between thought, culture and language seemed to congeal around the theme of incommensurability, which can be a matter of the capacity for understanding evident between minds as much as between cultures, and always mediated by some communicative form. The 'quest for commensurability,' suggested by the title of the thesis, refers to the often submerged but historically tantalising, occasionally glimpsed, 'holy grail' of mutual understanding, so commonly lost in the face of human diversity—with the result that diversity becomes problematic and the search is ended rather than continued. But as Barbara Hernstein Smith has pointed out, "The botanist who observed that the growth rate of the plant he was studying varied under different conditions would not murmur *De gustibus* and end his research but, on the contrary, begin it" (Smith, 1988: 11).

As a theme, the 'incommensurability of cultures' argument frequently appears in debates in which at issue are the complexities involved in communicating across difference and in defining and establishing identity in multi-cultural settings. This thesis traces the elaboration of this argument in British society from its appearance in the wider social debates over class and culture that took place both prior to and following post-war social and economic reform, through its emergence as a theme in educational debates over language and culture. Of particular relevance to the elaboration of the incommensurability of cultures argument in English education was the emergence of theories which were supportive of cultural and linguistic relativism. The desire to address the needs, particularly of working and lower middle class pupils, shifted the attention of educators and researchers to the particularities of the culture and the

language of these pupils. In the event, the practice of literary criticism came under particular scrutiny, for its perceived bias, associated with Leavis, toward an appeal to a single universal framework of values and beliefs (see Mulhern, 1981; Burgess and Martin, 1990). In an educational climate oriented toward empowering heretofore silenced voices, the idea of 'commensurability' began to be negatively perceived as a search for universals through a denial of difference, or as a hegemonic practice geared toward making the views of the dominant class appear as normative. In response to this, a form of relativistic argument prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s that, where and when it became salient, effectively invalidated the 'quest for commensurability,' by supporting the belief that cultures were 'incommensurable,' and communication across difference was, therefore, unattainable. The concept of incommensurability, however, was embraced rather than explored—the idea was viewed as a 'natural' outcome of the current prevailing theories of linguistic and cultural relativity and proved useful as a means to political or other instrumental ends. Notwithstanding the strong educational gains of that period, an important opportunity was missed to explore the issue of incommensurability as a means to address the deeper intellectual issues that arose in the course of the debates over language and culture, to make incommensurability the starting point and not the end of the investigation into the dynamics of cultural and linguistic diversity.

The Incommensurability Argument

In a lengthy and informative discussion of the relevance of the term 'incommensurability' to the philosophy of science and to the social sciences, the philosopher, Richard Bernstein, describes it as "...the

most exotic, controversial and perhaps the vaguest theme..." (see Bernstein, 1991: 79-108). The term itself was brought into prominence in philosophy and the social sciences through the writings of Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend (see Kuhn, 1970: Feyerabend, 1975). In applying the idea of incommensurability to science, Kuhn suggested that scientists involved in competing scientific paradigms 'practised their trades in different worlds,' i. e., they imposed divergent, non-inter-translatable, and possibly contradictory 'conceptual frameworks' on the same 'matèrial' world. In suggesting this, Kuhn wished to demonstrate that scientific progress or knowledge was less linear than dialectical; that rival scientific theories, for the most part, did not and could not build on one another in a cumulative, linear way for they were not compatible enough to do so (Bernstein, 1991: 80-87; and see Kuhn, 1970).

Kuhn's use of the term 'incommensurable' opened up a Pandora's box of controversy over the issues of relativism and universalism. He was criticised both for being a relativist and for claiming that scientific knowledge was irrational (see the collection of papers in Lakatos and Musgrave, 1970). Karl Popper, for example, suggested that Kuhn has fallen prey to what he referred to as the 'Myth of the Framework,' the idea that "we are prisoners caught in the framework of our theories; our expectations; our past experiences; our language" (Popper, 1970: 56). Against this idea, Popper argued that rational, critical, comparative discussion between conceptual frameworks was not only possible, but that it served the principle aim of scientific knowledge—to increase the truth-content of scientific theories. Neither Kuhn nor Popper held to any extreme relativistic or universalistic position, indeed, there was some degree of overlap in

their respective views. Popper's critique was not a plea for a common, neutral epistemological framework through which conflicts might be settled, it was an argument against a notion of relativism that made inter-translation and, by implication, 'cross-cultural' communication impossible. Kuhn argued not that translation or communication were impossible, but that in the process of translation, meanings were inevitably altered, and that no 'neutral observation language' could ever emerge or be applied (Kuhn, 1970a: 266-269).

The issue of incommensurability, and the controversies surrounding it, strike at the heart of questions about cultural and linguistic identity and the possibility of dialogue across different interpretive or conceptual frameworks. On the one hand, the notion of incommensurability challenges the idea that common measures, sets of standards, or 'criteria of rationality' exist or, as Popper argued, that "better and roomier frameworks" can come to exist, with which to understand and evaluate other cultures or languages. On the other hand, it raises the question of what happens when divergent cultures or languages do come into contact—of how, or indeed, if, it is possible to translate a set of ideas, beliefs, and values from one culture or language—one conceptual framework—into another (see Winch, 1977; Gellner, 1982; Lukes, 1982; Geertz, 1973, 1983).

The notion of incommensurability is often taken to establish both incompatibility and incomparability between different cultural groups; thus suggesting a strong form of relativism. The idea that the conceptual frameworks of disparate cultures or languages are incomparable, moreover, frequently carries with it the further implication that such frameworks are not mutually expressible—i. e., that there are no terms used in one culture that can be equated in

meaning and reference with any terms or expressions in the other (Putnam, 1981: 114)—and that, therefore, communication itself is impossible. This view of incommensurability also tends to presume or encourage a view of cultures or language users as integrated wholes. The very idea of the incomparability of conceptual frameworks is based on the belief that cultures are fairly intact, non-evolving entities. This notion of cultures, however, downplays the differences between members of the same culture as well as the possibility that the distinctions between different cultures do not necessarily differ in kind from the distinctions between members of a single culture.

The strong form of relativism which this view of incommensurability implies is also challengeable on the grounds that it leaves unresolved the question of how individuals from different cultures/linguistic groups determine that they *are* different—or, indeed, the same—if not by communicating with one another. This version of incommensurability has been criticised by ‘relativists’ and ‘rationalists’ alike as self-refuting (see Chomsky, 1965; Apel, 1977; Habermas, 1979; Putnam, 1981; Hollis and Lukes, 1982; Davidson, 1984; Rorty, 1991). For the very fact of *recognising* conceptual differences would already imply that, to a certain degree, such differences had been overcome,

...to demonstrate the existence of significant cultural difference that justifies speaking of cultural relativism, and that is not merely a matter of different problems, needs, priorities, preferences or tastes, we should be able to find rules of inference, methods of belief acceptance, or criteria of “rationality” which are in some way substantially different, or basic belief values that at least *prima facie*, are not formulatable in the other system. We should note, however, we would have modified at least one, and perhaps both, of the conceptual frameworks, and incommensurability would have been overcome. Nevertheless, a serious analysis along these lines would surely succeed in demonstrating that at some time

incommensurability did exist. This would be very welcome because incommensurability would have been defeated by that very fact (Olive, 1991: 73).

As a philosophical issue of considerable depth, incommensurability is one that can often be seen to lurk beneath less analytically self-conscious discourses than philosophy, informing them in ways that are not always apparent at the surface. The issue of incommensurability played a central role in the language and culture debates in English education by introducing the notion of relativism which acknowledged the diversity of cultures and languages in multi-(class) cultural settings at the same time that it problematised the idea of communication across difference.

The uptake in liberal pluralist educational discourses of the idea of cultures and languages as 'incommensurable,' can be traced to the German-born anthropologist Franz Boas who, working in the United States, argued against the evolutionist tradition prevalent throughout the West in the 19th century (Stocking, 1974). Boas disavowed the idea of physical or biological causality with respect to cultural phenomena that was being used in the West to support racist attitudes towards 'primitive' cultures. He maintained that cultures were integrated wholes comprised of 'almost accidental' accretions of elements—the products of "the history of the people, the influence of the regions through which it passed in its migrations, and the people with whom it came into contact" (Boas, quoted in Stocking, 1974: 5). He viewed the formation of cultures and of languages as both a conscious and an unconscious process, one in which the "genius of a people" acted to mold the accumulated elements of its history into traditional patterns of behaviour or meaningful wholes:

For Boas, the integration of wholes was not a matter of necessary or logical relations of elements. Its character was best described not in terms of 'structure' or 'system' but in terms of 'meaning,' 'theme,' 'focus' and 'pattern.' In all this it reflected its origin in the rather loose romantic concept of the 'genius' or Geist of a people (Stocking, 1974: 8).

Boas' ideas on culture were taken up by his student, Ruth Benedict, whose book, *Patterns of Culture*, published in 1935, reiterated Boas' belief in cultures as historically constituted articulated wholes and not as biologically transmitted complexes of behaviour. Against the prevailing Western ethnocentrism towards 'primitive' cultures, Benedict argued for the 'incommensurability' of cultures, echoing Boas in her emphasis on cultures as demonstrations of distinctive 'patterns,' not simply varied assortments of incoherent acts and beliefs. In her study of three 'primitive' cultures, for example, she argued,

They differ from one another not only because one trait is present here and absent there, and because another trait is found in two regions in two different forms. They differ still more because they are oriented as wholes in different directions. They are travelling along different roads in pursuit of different ends, and these ends and these means in one society cannot be judged in terms of those of another, because essentially they are incommensurable (Benedict, 1935, 161).

Both Boas and Benedict downplayed the universal aspects of human behaviour, although Boas did view human beings' tendency to classify phenomena as common to all cultures (Stocking, 1974: 8). Moreover, although they acknowledged the historical fact of cultural interpenetration, they were primarily concerned to document and describe local processes of integration and classification. For Benedict, 'primitive' cultures were the best sources for studying the diversity of

coherent patterns of behaviour precisely because they had been less affected by historical contact with others (Benedict, 1935: 12).

This weaker form of relativism has carried on in the history of liberal pluralist cultures and in educational contexts concerned to acknowledge their diverse populations, and, at the same time, promote tolerance and harmony. Just as Boas and Benedict argued against racist and ethnocentric accounts of difference, the idea of 'different but equal' in educational contexts has aimed to recognise and empower the cultures and languages of pupils that have gone unnoticed or have been undervalued. In such situations, where 'empowerment' is the aim, the priority is commonly deemed to be not dialogue *across* difference—but dialogue *about* difference. To this end, the emphasis is on what makes individuals or cultures distinctive, not what makes them similar. But while what makes one culture distinct from another is an important issue in its own right, or as a strategy within multicultural education, and in struggles over social justice generally, it can also serve to close down rather than open up the question of how individuals critically understand or alter their perceptions of themselves and others, thus implicating the extreme form of relativism outlined above.

The 'quest for commensurability' undertaken in this thesis is not a denial of difference or even of 'incommensurability.' The title does not imply a search for universals or a common category of 'human' that transcends cultural and linguistic bounds. Diversity is not viewed as a problem which must be overcome. Instead, it argues that what must be overcome is the absolute endorsement of particularity and difference; the idea that individuals or cultures are so permanently enclosed in radically different conceptual frameworks that no

comparisons or communication—in other words, no understanding—can occur.

The thesis approaches its theme through a historical and analytical account of the complex of cultural and language issues relevant to the field of English education. Beginning with a consideration of the themes of mass and popular culture and education, it moves through the broad cultural context of the 1920s and 1930s and 1950s and 1960s, particularly through the prism of literary culture. It then moves to a close examination of some of the longer historical roots of some of the dominant concepts of the relationship between language and culture that informed the period. These it relates to the relevant elaboration of the intellectual field, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s. Finally it returns to its underlying theme and reassesses the issue of in/commensurability in the light of its analysis.

Chapter Two considers the debates that took place over the status and function of mass culture, and culture in general, in the 1920s and 1930s. Three different perspectives—representative of the dominant strands of thinking in the culture debates of that period—are examined through the contributions of T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis and the British literary Left. This chapter establishes the issue of the incommensurability of cultures as one which historically has been implicated in debates over culture in Britain. In covering what is possibly over-familiar ground, the chapter is intended to serve as a relevant backdrop to the continued consideration given to the issues of culture and language in the rest of the thesis.

Chapter Three provides further historical background on the theme of incommensurability and its relevance to the culture and language debates. The rise of 1950s' and 1960s' modernity is linked to

the reassessment of the status of mass culture in British society, and to the reappraisal of Leavis and literary criticism that began in this period. The attempts of the New Left to theorise the role of literature and literary criticism from a Marxist perspective are also considered.

Chapter Four argues that the emergent critique of Leavis and the practice of literary criticism was both a product of developments within the field of English education, and a reflex of the wider social debate that emerged in British society in the late 1950s, which increasingly set tradition against modernity and was represented in the Leavis—Snow "Two Cultures" controversy. It re-analyses the significance of that controversy on developments within English education both with regard to Leavis and literary criticism and to the role of tradition and aesthetic practices in general.

Chapter Five begins during the period of the frequently observed 'paradigm shift' from literature to language in English education. It offers a critical analysis of the politics of the intellectual field that informed the language paradigm, focusing primarily on the contributions of James Britton, Basil Bernstein, Harold Rosen and Michael Halliday. The language and culture debates are considered in the light of each of their contributions. Relevant influences from the field of sociolinguistics are also included. Particular consideration is given to the competing theories of language and culture that informed the language paradigm and the concept(s) of culture that emerged within English education as a result.

Chapter Six traces the earliest formulation of the relationship between thought and language from its first appearance in the work of Leibniz and at greater length through the work of the often ignored but

fascinating German religious thinker J. G. Hamann and the further elaboration of Hamann's ideas in the also under recognised figure of J. G. Herder. Herder's contribution to the incommensurability of cultures thesis is examined in detail. The work of Wilhelm von Humboldt, the figure most commonly associated with providing an account of the relationship between language, culture and thought, is also considered.

Chapter Seven reconsiders the theme of incommensurability in relation to the politics of the intellectual field of English education in the 1960s and 1970s, and to the fate of aesthetic experience as a component of the English curriculum. A role for aesthetic criticism in multi-(class) cultural contexts is considered, drawing on insights from Herder and other contemporary contributors to this theme. The chapter ends with a discussion of the relationship between linguistically-mediated activities and the extension and transformation of cultured meanings. This relationship is considered through the writings on language and hermeneutic understanding of Hans-Georg Gadamer, and through the universal pragmatics and critical theory of Jurgen Habermas.

Chapter Two

The Culture Debates in the 1920s and the 1930s

The Politics of Culture: a social background

The increasing influence of mass culture in British society during the 1920s and 1930s prompted a revival of public discussions about the status and function of culture which had first appeared in the 19th century when the Romantic movement arose in response to industrialisation. The 'products' of mass culture that became available to all members of society in varying degrees by the 1930s, regardless of class background, e. g., radio and cinema, were viewed with suspicion by those who considered these 'passive' forms of entertainment a threat to the cultivation of culture, on the one hand (Seaman, 1966: 160-161; Taylor, 1975: 177-182, 315), and on the other, a diversion from political activism on the part of the unemployed (Miles and Smith, 1987: 27). The occurrence of what appeared to be the unceasing influx of mass culture in everyday life, particularly the more influential forms like advertising, broadcasting, newspaper publishing and the cinema, prompted debate amongst intellectuals and educators about the content of and relationships between high culture, working class culture, popular culture and mass culture and their respective force and status within British society.¹

¹ To take cinema as an example, the following statistics illustrate the kinds of trends that were considered by some as cause for concern: forty per cent of the population went to the cinema at least once a week; twenty-five per cent went twice a week; in the Depressed areas, Cardiff, for example, fifty-two per cent of unemployed youth went to the cinema once a week and almost half of these went twice a week; and in Liverpool and Glasgow, also areas of high unemployment, as many as eighty per cent went at least once a week (Mowat, 1968: 485, 501).

The motive underlying these debates, however, was not solely due to concern over the phenomenon of mass culture, although this was an important catalyst. The first World War had shaken the social and cultural foundations of British society, leaving incoherent and in doubt what had previously been perceived as a stable socio-cultural order. As Shils has commented about this period,

Indeed, even when he loved his cottage, or his Regency house, or some little spot of English soil, the intellectual's love of Britain was overshadowed by a feeling of repugnance for its dreary, unjust, and uncultured society, with its impotent ruling classes and its dull and puritanical middle classes. It was not particular institutions or attitudes that were repellent but the whole notion of Britain or England. This was not just the view of the communists or the aesthetes. It was the view of nearly everyone who in the 1920s and 1930s was considered worthy of mention in intellectual circles in Great Britain...the prevailing attitude, in quantity and emphasis, was one of alienation (Shils, 1955: 6).

In the 1920's, this feeling of alienation was directly attributed to the war, as Taylor has suggested, "English people both Left and Right blamed everything on the war and believed that all would be well if its effects were somehow undone" (Taylor, 1975: 238). By the 1930s, however, images of hunger marches and of human deprivation had replaced those of the war and a new source of alienation became the conditions in the 'Depressed areas' in the north (Mowat, 1968: 463-468) where chronic unemployment was having devastating effects on whole communities. This, and the simultaneous rise of world fascism and the Great Depression contributed to the belief that chaos and social decay were the order of the day.²

² Many historians have stressed that these images are part myth part reality in that many working people in the thirties actually experienced a better standard of living and new levels of consumption than they had in the previous decade. For many salaried workers it became possible for the first time in the thirties to buy a

It was in this context that the culture debates became a forum for attempts to resolve how the restoration of a social and cultural order would come about, and in what form this new order would appear. The arguments evident at that time reveal a complex and often contradictory juxtapositioning of ideas and beliefs regarding the notion of culture that reflect the disorder of the period. There was no simple or clearly demarcated correspondence between beliefs held and class or political affiliations, and there was often implicit agreement between certain conservative and radical views regarding, for example, the negative influence of mass culture or the specific class nature of culture and cultural products. The debates included several inter-related issues which were particularly difficult for participants to untangle. Amongst these were: the problem of defining what constituted a legitimate and distinct culture or cultural form; the question of the role of an elite or vanguard party in influencing or determining the value or status of a culture or a cultural form; and the increasing blurring of any distinction between a 'mass' and a 'popular' culture.

The notion of culture as grounded in some traditional 'way of life' was supported by conservatives and radical participants alike, and served in their respective critiques of mass culture. For their part, conservative elites sought to maintain and defend the 'cultural inheritance,' upheld within high culture, by denying claims to it by anyone other than themselves. Mass culture was viewed by them simultaneously as a disturbance to the integrity of high culture and as a threat to the class-segregated cultures of the past. This position was a particularly fragile one amongst the upper classes in the 1920s and

home, own a car, and acquire a range of consumer goods (Taylor, 1975: 298-320; Stevenson & Cook, 1979: 5-6, 8-30).

1930s, however, since, in contrast to the traditional landed aristocracy who were grounded in the anti-materialism of the public schools, many of the newer members of the upper classes came from the commercial bourgeoisie and owed their newly acquired social status to their success in commerce and industry (Hobsbawn, 1967: 235; Weiner, 1981: 96; Rubinstein, 1993). Hence, their links to the mass culture industry were inextricable. Although increasing economic and political ties between these two groups clearly made it expedient to find some common cultural ground on which to firm up their partnership, the difference in their backgrounds was not always easily disguised (Miles and Smith, 1987: 10-11).

A challenge from within the upper classes came from aristocratic youth who, both as a reaction to the horrors of the war which they blamed on their parents' generation and due to their growing enthusiasm for the popular culture of their own generation, began to question the class system itself and its high cultural elitism (Taylor, 1975: 177; Seaman, 1966: 157). Some of these youth became (for the most part temporarily) aligned with the Left and in particular, Marxism, during the 1930s, and developed their critiques of society along radical political lines, while for others it remained merely a generational dispute.

According to historians of the period, whatever their positions, most of this younger generation found themselves aligned with their class with regard to mass culture. Some, like their parents, viewed mass culture as evidence of the invasion of bourgeois industrial society. While they were prepared to mount a challenge to the class system from within their aristocratic traditions, they were not prepared to witness the demise of the tradition altogether. Others shared the

more radical critiques of mass culture that were popular with the Left during this period. This group were dedicated to strengthening both the ideal and the reality of an 'authentic' working class culture to challenge bourgeois capitalism and protect the working classes against capitalism's imposition of mass culture. They viewed the products of mass culture as tools of capitalism which both imposed capitalist ideology and militated against class struggle.³

At the same time, however, the Left had to acknowledge that the forms of entertainment and leisure provided by the mass culture industry appealed to members of the working and lower middle classes, and were perceived by them as improving the quality of their lives.⁴ Moreover, at some level, popular forms of entertainment and leisure actually broke down barriers between class cultures by appealing to and recognising a broader 'classless' public. Participants in the debates on the Left thus found themselves embracing several contradictory realities. Their stand against mass culture, for example, put them in conflict with much of the population's relationship to it and unappreciative of its corrosive effects, however minimal, on the

³ This view is supported in the account given by Miles and Smith who claim that the cinema contributed to the absence of class confrontation in the inter-war period. They claim that feature films defused issues like unemployment through means of comedy and by moving the context from the social and political to the personal and moral. Instead of being considered as a national disaster, for example, the issue of unemployment was translated in both newsreel footage and feature films into national valour while the Depressed areas were transformed into heroic examples of British fortitude. Likewise, reports on hunger strikes or the conditions of the unemployed were presented as a form of entertainment rather than journalism—"the dole [became] just another of those institutionalised difficulties that were the stock-in-trade of the earlier music hall comedians, like mothers-in-law, rentmen and toffs."—and this, they suggest, encouraged adaptation rather than revolution on the part of the working classes (Miles and Smith, 1987: 27).

⁴ The historian, A. J. P. Taylor, who has called the cinema the "greatest educative force in the early twentieth century," supported this view. In his estimation, the cinema changed the pattern of life for the better for the lower middle classes in general by, amongst other things, taking people from their homes and allowing men and women to share their leisure time (Taylor, 1975: 237).

rigid class nature of British society in general. Moreover, their privileging of an authentic working class culture implied and even encouraged the exclusion of the working classes from high culture, a position which aligned the Left's position with that of the conservative elites. Finally, the Left, and this is particularly true of those Marxists who came from the upper classes, although opposed to the idea of a class-based elitism, tended to install themselves as the intellectual vanguard of the working classes. The desire to privilege working class culture and raise its status both as a resource against capitalism and within socialism at times involved a kind of 'cultural engineering' in which upper class intellectuals took it upon themselves to select and distinguish between authentic and inauthentic forms of working class culture.⁵

The Culture Debates—Literature and Literary Criticism

By the 1930s, within the culture debates, a renewed and vital interest in the role and function of literature in shaping and maintaining 'cultural continuity' emerged in the face of the increasing effects of mass culture and modern industrialisation in Britain, and as a reaction to the social disorder caused by the war. As Terry Eagleton remarks,

⁵ The Left were not alone in their desire for an 'authentic' popular culture to ward off the invidious effects of mass culture. Amongst folklorists, for example, the desire to contrast the healthy, worthwhile folk song with the vulgar, emasculated popular tune was strong during this period and there were increased attempts to revive the old English folk songs before they were overtaken by the popular blues and hit tunes from America and the Music Hall of the urban working classes (Seaman, 1966: 161). In 1924, Sir Hubert Parry of the *Journal of the Folk Song Society* described such "modern tunes" as representing "all the brazen effrontery, the meanest grossness, and the most hideous and blatant repulsiveness" (Shiach, 1989: 125). However, it has been pointed out that many of these folklorists excluded songs dealing with drink and removed objectionable words and erotic references from their own collections of 'culturally authentic' texts (Shiach, 1989; and see Harker, 1980).

Literature rode to power on the back of wartime nationalism; but it also represented a search for spiritual solutions on the part of an English ruling class whose sense of identity had been profoundly shaken, whose psyche was ineradicably scarred by the horrors it had endured. Literature would be at once solace and reaffirmation, a familiar ground on which Englishmen could regroup both to explore, and to find some alternative to, the nightmare of history (Eagleton, 1983: 30).

The tensions and contradictions contained within the various responses to changing class cultures and the emergence of mass culture discussed above took on particular meaning in the fields of literature and literary criticism. Several key spokespersons emerged to take part in the debates about literature and its relationship to culture.

T. S. Eliot, who played a pre-eminent role in defining the parameters of contemporary poetry and whose ideas on education and culture provoked praise and criticism in the literary world and beyond, was one such contributor. His position, for reasons discussed below, was an elaboration of that held by the traditional conservative elites.

Another contributor was F. R. Leavis whose influence on the field of literary criticism and the content and practice of English teaching from the 1930s to the 1950s was profound. Leavis and the Leavisites introduced the idea of English literature and literary criticism as a means by which to both maintain and spread the cultural heritage beyond the bounds of the traditional elite. The Leavisites contributed the idea of the 'democratisation' of high culture to the culture debates, incorporating both radical and conservative ideas in pursuit of this cause. Finally, the literary wing of the British Marxists and other writers and artists of the Left contributed to the debate guided by developments within the artistic bloc of the Soviet Union and by their own readings of Marx and Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

All of these participants both reflected the positions outlined above and added new dimensions to the debates taking place in the wider society. One central and persistent question which arose from their discussions about literature and culture was that of the need for and the role of a cultural elite or an elite culture in British society. This question was not, of course, a new one. In the 19th century, Coleridge had argued for the notion of a Clerisy, or National Church whose responsibility to society would be the cultivation of culture (Williams, 1958: 63) and Matthew Arnold had called on men of culture—the "true apostles of equality"—to deliver the "sweetness and light" of culture from one end of society to another (Arnold, 1983: 31). More recent influences came from European theorists like Vilfredo Pareto, Karl Mannheim and Jose Ortega y Gasset whose theories of mass society and the role of elites had become influential in Britain and America by the thirties (Ortega y Gasset, 1932; Kornhauser, 1959; Bramson, 1961). While these theorists supplied the more conservative thinkers with ideas during this period, a more radical perspective was made available in Britain through writers, politicians and events in the Soviet Union and Spain (see discussion below, pp. 35-42).

If any definite conclusions emerge from this study, one of them is surely this, that culture is the one thing we cannot deliberately aim at...T. S. Eliot

Eliot's cultural conservatism was determined by a conflux of influences in his personal biography. He had come to London in 1915 from the United States where he had already witnessed the decline in the role of the aristocracy (of which his own family was a part) in dictating the culture and tradition of the nation. With the possible exception of the American South where "blood and breeding still

counted for something," he perceived that the traditional aristocracy in the United States had begun to be overtaken by the industrial middle class. Upon his arrival in England, Eliot thus began "a wholesale salvage and demolition job on its literary tradition" (Eagleton, 1983: 38). His chief criticism of modern English sensibility was that it had become 'unself-conscious.' He believed that in order for culture—which he defined as a 'way of life'—to survive, it had to be 'organically' related to experience, a sixth sense of sorts.

Eliot opposed the ideology of middle-class liberalism that prevailed under industrial capitalism because, according to him, it encouraged the idea of 'social laissez-faire'—a by-product of economic individualism which created an 'atomic' as opposed to an 'organic' view of society. If elites were chosen on the basis of professional interests, they would be likely to lack the social cohesion and continuity vital to sustaining the cultural heritage (Eliot, 1948: 35-49; and see Bantock, 1949; Williams, 1958; Eagleton, 1983). He was similarly opposed to the creation of a national education system that would advocate 'parity of esteem' for although he allowed for the mixing of classes—each should have constant additions and defections—he believed that ultimately classes themselves should remain distinct,

...to aim to make everyone share in the appreciation of the fruits of the more conscious parts of culture is to adulterate and cheapen what you give...(Eliot, 1948: 106).

Eliot was particularly concerned that education in democratic, industrialised countries was tending toward some unguided, abstract notion of uniformity which threatened the cultural heritage of the

nation. For him, to force all students, regardless of class background, to acquire a variety of specialisms that had no connection with the life of the individual student would be an superficial and artificial endeavour—"a mass culture will always be a substitute culture" (Eliot, 1948: 107). Eliot's assumption was that culture, language and lived experience combined to create a unity of sensibility among members of the same class and that, therefore, the democratisation of culture would inevitably lead to a dissociation of sensibility.

Eliot's literary criticism did contain a universalistic, spiritual dimension that can be seen in his belief that culture and language must be closely connected to experience and that a poem should succeed through enigmatic images in penetrating the "primitive levels at which all men and women experienced alike" (Eagleton, 1983: 41). His engagement with the collective unconscious in poetry was influenced by his own membership in the Christian church (see Eliot, 1939, 1948, 1960). As Miles and Smith suggest, "at the heart of his literary criticism was a quasi-medieval idea of the civilisation of Christendom, of a supranational European civilisation unified in spirit through its common foundation in Christian values and beliefs" (Miles and Smith, 1987: 96).

Nevertheless, Eliot's universalism relied on the existing class system to explicate the role of culture and language in society. His idea of the unified spirit of a "supranational European civilisation" was based on an ideal order which was imbued with all of the social and cultural characteristics of the aristocratic and upper middle class of the period, not the population as a whole. Moreover, not only was Eliot's definition of culture grounded in a class-based society, the idea of distributing high culture to members of all classes was anathema to

him. The responsibility of the literary critic was to uphold and *keep* hold of the 'tradition,' not to dispense it to the whole of society—an act which would fail, in any event, since it would be induced by conscious effort.

Eliot's notion of culture as unself-conscious was similar to the view of cultures as incommensurable expressed by Herder, who maintained that certain activities located within a culture revealed a property or quality—not capable of being abstracted or articulated—that was specific to that culture. For Herder, as Berlin explains, "...to be fully human, that is, fully creative, one must belong somewhere, to some group or some historical stream which cannot be defined save in the generic terms of tradition and milieu and culture, themselves generated by natural forces..."(Berlin, 1965: 43). However, there are important differences in the uses to which Herder and Eliot put their views. Whereas Herder argued for incommensurability in order to break with the classical rationalist tradition and to oppose the forced migration of peoples from their native environments (Herder's views will be discussed at length in Chapter Six), Eliot embraced the idea of incommensurability to argue that since mutual understanding was impossible between members of different class cultures, the idea of common education was unnatural and doomed to failure. The malleability of the notion of cultural incommensurability/relativism which these different applications suggest will be explored in subsequent chapters.

The aim is to produce a mind that will approach the problems of modern civilisation with an understanding of their origins, a maturity of outlook, and, not a nostalgic addiction to the past, but a sense of human possibilities...F. R. Leavis

Leavis shared with Eliot a concern for the breakdowns and disjunctures within the social and cultural life of the British people due to industrialisation and the effects of mass culture. However, Leavis and his colleagues were, unlike Eliot, a product of the new state of British socio-cultural affairs as well as major contributors to its impact on English literary-academic life. Socially they reinforced the emerging class pattern of newly educated intellectuals who were for the most part petit bourgeois or lower class in origin; they were from amongst that layer of society who were entering the traditionally upper class universities for the first time, but without the class allegiances which would prevent them from challenging the authority of those institutions. Thus their presence at Cambridge suggested the possibility for the first time in Britain of participation in positions of power and prestige by intellectual and aesthetic means rather than through class or inheritance (Miles and Smith, 1987: 90; Green, 1959, 1961).

Against traditional conservatives like Eliot, Leavis introduced the idea that the democratic distribution of high culture—and more specifically, literary culture—by a trained intellectual vanguard was the way to combat the adverse effects of mass culture and bourgeois individualism. His wife and colleague, Q. D. Leavis, in her book, published in 1932, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, maintained that industrialisation and urbanisation had debased inherited values and deprived the masses and the dominant classes alike of critical standards by which to judge and maintain their traditional cultures (Leavis, 1932). The Leavises sought to counter the influences of popular fiction

and the popular press with the re-establishment of a community of values, intellectual authority and culture (Mulhern, 1981).

Inspired by I. A. Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism*, published in 1924, and *Practical Criticism*, published in 1929, Leavis' commitment to the critical method shared with Richards a belief in art as continuous, not contrastive, with the rest of human activity, and in art as the most valuable of all such activities because it encouraged what Richards had described as the balancing and ordering of human impulses (Richards, 1935). Furthermore, Leavis perceived literature and art as expressions of culture, which he viewed not simply as a distinct 'way of life' but as a form of human community. He believed that he and his colleagues were laying down the foundations for a universal "human culture" achieved by cultivating a certain autonomy of the human spirit (Leavis, 1986: 35).

Leavis' model for this community was based on his notion of the organic, rural community which he felt had been destroyed by the impact of the Industrial Revolution. Leavis' description of the rural community of the past is reminiscent of Durkheim's description of the 'mechanical' social solidarity which characterised societies prior to industrialisation and which was based on the homogeneity of moral belief and a simple correspondence between material and social life (Durkheim, 1933). Durkheim was interested in how members of a society dealt with the shift from a common moral culture to the more abstract collective consciousness found in modern industrial societies. It was Leavis' intention to intervene in this shift, providing the tools necessary for the formation of a modern sensibility that equalled that of the organic communities of the past. As he stated in 'Under which king, Benzonian?'

For it is true that culture in the past has borne a close relation to the 'methods of production'. A culture expressing itself in a tradition of literature and art—such a tradition as represents the finer consciousness of the race and provides the currency of finer living—can be a healthy state only if this tradition is in living relation with a real culture, shared by the people at large. The point might be enforced by saying (there is no need to elaborate) that Shakespeare did not invent the language that he used. And when England had a popular culture, the structure, the framework, of it was a stylisation, so to speak of economic necessities; based, it might fairly be said, on the 'methods of production' was an art of living, involving codes, developed in ages of continuous experience, of relations between man and man, and man and the environment in its seasonal rhythm. This culture the progress of the nineteenth century destroyed, in country and in town it destroyed (to use a phrase now familiar) the organic community. And what survives of cultural tradition in any important sense survives in spite of the rapidly changing 'means of production' (Leavis, 1986: 40).

Leavis was critical of the popular Marxist position of the 1930s which argued for a direct correspondence between 'methods of production' and cultural products, for he felt that the Marxists were discouraging "the kinds of discipline without which culture will indeed be something like a mere function of the economic conditions, of the machinery of the civilisation" (Leavis, 1986: 35). He was convinced that the way to combat modern industrialisation and the accompanying onslaught of mass culture—"the work of capitalism and its products, the cheap car, the wireless and the cinema" (Leavis, 1986: 44)—was through rigorous and disciplined intellectual, aesthetic and moral activity that was "not merely an expression of class origin and economic circumstances" (Leavis, 1986: 35). He was completely against the glorification of "working class values" as he believed they were "inevitably those induced by the modern environment—by 'capitalist' civilisation" (Leavis, 1986: 43). In fact, according to Leavis, any values, bourgeois or Marxist, which were linked to the material environment

in the industrial age were to be rejected in favour of a 'critical' education,

A cogent way in which the human spirit can refute the Marxian theory and the bourgeois negative lies open in education...Whether or not we are playing the capitalist game should soon be apparent, for a serious effort in education involves the fostering of a critical attitude towards civilisation as it is. Perhaps there will be no greater public outcry when it is proposed to introduce into schools a training in resistance to publicity and in criticism of newspapers - for this is the least opposable way of presenting the start in real modern education...The teaching profession is peculiarly in a position to do revolutionary things; corporate spirit there can be unquestionably disinterested and by a bold challenge there perhaps the self-devotion of the intelligent may be more effectively enlisted than by an appeal to the Class War (Leavis, 1986: 53).

The training offered through practical criticism was to serve as the means to empower the public with the ability to distinguish and insist on an anti-acquisitive and anti-competitive culture that was *not* tied to the material environment. Leavis' 'immanent' concern was that the erosion of any cultural authority in Britain created too fertile an environment for the proliferation of mass culture. He was convinced that it was the duty of the intellectual to act to re-establish such authority in order to avoid the decline and fall of culture. What or whose cultural knowledge should be dispersed was not a question of social class or political hegemony. The 'authority' Leavis appealed to was that of the inner and spiritual essence of civilisation—"a point of view above classes"(Leavis, 1986: 35)—and as far away from the forces of production as possible.

Leavis' universalism distanced him from the Left, and did not gain him favour with the traditional ruling class either, at least not

initially.⁷ The Leavises' vision of how the "self-devotion of the intelligent" should proceed was considered at the time both radical and threatening to the pre-war upper-class British literati (Eagleton, 1983) and they were frequently attacked by members of the literary establishment,

Attacks on 'the preferences of a rather pharisaical minority', reviews snidely entitled 'First Class Passengers Only' and facetious references to 'the storm troops of Discrimination' were the natural reflexes of a consumerist literary culture whose latitudinarian 'taste' was less democratic than patronising, and formed by the same complacent social expectations that supported the more subtle pleasures of belles lettres and 'scholarship for its own sake' (Mulhern, 1981: 318-319).

The Leavises, in turn, antagonised members of the traditional literati. The Bloomsbury group, for example—which Mowat suggests did in fact become a haven for pseudo-intellectuals and the arty-crafty crowd in the period following the twenties (Mowat, 1968: 217)—were criticised by the Leavises for “[celebrating] their own subjectivity for a modest public salary” (Inglis, 1982: 100). Q. D. Leavis' attack on Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* as nothing more than “boudoir scholarship” written by a “self-pampering victim of class privilege” is illustrative of just how scathing *Scrutiny* reviewers could be against members of the Bloomsbury set (Mulhern, 1981, 1990).

Although it was the Leavisite's renegade literary criticism that was the target of the traditional aristocracy's criticism, the hostility they expressed toward the Leavises and *Scrutiny* was also a reaction to the

⁷ In fact, it has often been affirmed that Leavis and *Scrutiny* were never fully accepted at Cambridge (Anderson, 1968; Hayman, 1977; Miles and Smith, 1987) nor recognised by the main literary weeklies of the day (Bradbury, 1956; Watson, 1977). Mulhern, however, offers evidence to refute this latter claim (Mulhern, 1981: 314-318).

fact that during the 1920s and 1930s the public schools and Oxbridge were experiencing a relative decline within an expanding educational system while educational prospects improved to a degree for lower middle class children. Leavis and others like him at Cambridge were a reminder of the weakening of the intellectual order led by the old Victorian ruling class. Mulhern, in his book *The Moment of Scrutiny* argues that the power of disturbance so often attributed to Leavis himself was in reality that of a whole cultural current and of *Scrutiny*, the instrument that sustained and directed it (Mulhern, 1981). Within a short period of time, instigated by figures such as H. M. Chadwick and I. A. Richards and carried on by Leavis, a newly formed discourse on literature in the national culture had been established with Cambridge as its institutional base (Hayman, 1976; Mulhern, 1981; Eagleton, 1983)—a radical move within English as a discipline. The reform of English studies at Cambridge threatened the art for art's sake aestheticism which historically had dominated at that institution. The impact of this was more than slightly felt, as Eagleton states, "in the early 1920s, it was desperately unclear why English was worth studying at all; by the early 1930s it had become a question of why it was worth wasting your time on anything else" (Eagleton, 1983: 31).

Ironically, although in subsequent years, Leavis would be considered an upholder of an old social order, in the 1930s his literary criticism was founded on radical intellectual grounds. Marxist writers have suggested that Leavis' anti-Marxist stance was largely a reaction to the particular brand of 'vulgar leftism' that predominated in the 1930s in Britain. Perry Anderson, for example, maintains that *Scrutiny* was actually "born in close relation to Marxism" and that Leavis' antagonism to the Marxist critics and writers was more a response to

the "modish literary leftism," that took over the literary world in the thirties than disagreement over the idea of some form of economic communism (Anderson, 1968: 50-51). Some writers have also asserted that the intellectual dimension of the work of 'literary' Marxists like W. H. Auden, Christopher Caudwell and C. Day Lewis offered no real challenge to the work being produced by Leavis and *Scrutiny* during the same period (Anderson, 1968; Mulhern, 1981; Williams, 1981). But Mulhern, in particular, nevertheless criticises Leavis for his refusal to frame the question of cultural authority in political terms (Mulhern, 1981: 330). While Mulhern's point is a legitimate one, he himself has acknowledged that the impact of the Left on English literary culture in the 1930s was, in reality, not as radical as the Leavises during the same period—and it is indeed arguable that the Leavisites' 'non-political' challenge to both the Cambridge literary establishment and the tradition of belles lettres had a more radicalising cultural effect than the politicised rhetoric of the literary Left during this period. The Left's contribution to the culture debates in the 1930s, discussed below, nevertheless remains important, for it established a radical view of the relationship between class, culture and literature that would re-emerge as significant in the post-war period of educational restructuring.

The British Literary Left

The contributions of the literary Left of the 1930s to the culture debates were motivated by several interrelated issues and events which had taken over the country during that period. Amongst these were the rise of fascism in Europe and, in particular, the Spanish Civil War; discussions taking place within the Soviet Union on literature and culture; the increasing impact of mass culture on the British public;

and a concern for the massive, chronic domestic unemployment that continued in many areas of Britain. The issue of unemployment, in particular, led to the increasing perception of the thirties in Britain as "the devil's decade" (Taylor, 1975: 317; Stevenson and Cook, 1979: 3), and prompted many British writers of this period to express what they believed to be the general sentiments of the times. As Mowat perhaps somewhat cynically suggests, "To write only for themselves seemed a guilty indulgence; they must strike against bourgeois illusions, such as liberty, they must join forces with the millions of unemployed workers who have nothing to lose but their chains" (Mowat, 1968: 529).

Poets like W. H. Auden, C. Day Lewis and Steven Spender were some of the more prominent members of a newly formed Marxist literary set that appeared during the 1930s. They, along with other writers like Christopher Isherwood, Ralph Fox, John Strachey and Lewis Grassic Gibbon, developed their theories on the relationship between social and aesthetic values mainly through their associations with the British Section of the Writers' International, the monthly journal *Left Review* and through the Left Book Club. The *Left Review* organised its agenda in the 1930s around the defeat of fascism and the publication of 'revolutionary literature.' Similarly, the Left Book Club founded in 1936 by publisher and businessman Victor Gollancz, sought out authors sympathetic to the struggle for socialism. In addition, the Club organised meetings and rallies in support of Spain and the U. S. S. R. (Seaman, 1966: 301-302). The Left Book Club, whose membership reached 50,000 by 1937, also brought the issue of unemployment to broader public awareness by publishing books such as Gollan's *Youth in British Industry*, M. Cohen's *I Was One of the Unemployed* and Wal Hannington's *The Distressed Areas* (Stevenson

and Cook, 1979: 75). During this period, writers and intellectuals looked increasingly for new ways of conceptualising the relationship between Marxism, literature and culture. Their discussions and inquiries took two specific directions in terms of the culture debates—the role of the Left (and in particular, Marxism) with respect to literary studies/criticism and the relationship between the Left and mass culture.

Many Leftist and Marxist writers/critics in the 1930s argued that literary criticism should consist of distinguishing between revolutionary kinds of writing, i. e., writing that reflected the fundamental tensions in the social order, and reactionary writing, i. e., writing that emphasised the liberal individualist hero. While there was some debate amongst the Left, influenced by Lenin's and Trotsky's interpretations of Marx on culture, over such issues as which writing should be considered revolutionary, what constituted authentic working class culture, how much freedom the artist should have under socialism and how important past works of literature were to the struggle (see *Left Review*, 1, No. 5, 1935), it was nevertheless the case that a rather narrow version of Marxist literary theory predominated in the thirties in Britain (see the Introduction in Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 1977).

The task of the Marxist writer and of Marxist literary criticism was to find ways to increase production of politically-engaged texts—with the primary emphasis on textual *production* rather than criticism (Williams, 1981). The prevailing belief was that socialist writers should seek to substitute the bourgeois model of individualism with representations of a collective consciousness. Thus, the collection of essays in C. Day Lewis' *The Mind in Chains: Socialism and the Cultural*

Revolution published in 1937 called on writers to link their works to the class struggle. This was the popular appeal of the decade, as Spender expressed it,

The socialist artist is concerned with realising in his work the ideas of a classless society; that is to say, applying those ideas to the life around him, and giving them their reality. He is concerned with a change of heart (Spender, 1935: 146).

The type of criticism that these writers/critics offered tended to be concerned with how or whether a novel or poem served a revolutionary political purpose. Spender wrote of a C. Day Lewis poem, for example, that it "asserts that two worlds exist and are fighting: the striving worlds are obviously intended to represent the class war, or at all events the rivalry between revolution and reaction." And while he acknowledged that some might see these issues as overly simplified in the poem, he argued that "this does not really affect the real claim of the poem to value. The implicit assertion of the poem is that it is about realities: that the struggle between two worlds is real—as real as the descriptions of environment in novels—that the material of the poem is life" (Spender, 1935: 145-146).

In addition to producing their own texts, much attention was given to defining the appropriate aim and content of 'the working class novel,' 'the socialist novel' or 'the proletarian novel' as it was simultaneously labelled. Ralph Fox's posthumously published book *The Novel and the People* (1937) advanced the view that the novel was a peculiarly bourgeois art form and as such was a sensitive indicator of the health of bourgeois society. He and those who shared this point of view believed that the novel was headed for decline (corresponding to

the impending crisis in capitalist society) and that the time was ripe for the novel to be appropriated by the working classes and re-emerge in new form—although, others, including Orwell, thought that until proletarian culture achieved dominance the proletarian writer would only produce bourgeois literature with a slightly different slant and that, therefore, perhaps more attention should be paid to more typically working class cultural forms e. g., the music halls or even the cinema (*Left Review*, 1, No. 5, 1935).

Setting the guidelines for the appropriation of the bourgeois novel was not, however, to be undertaken by working class writers. Writers of working class origin during the 1930s found themselves in the position of writing 'working class novels' whose 'authenticity' was being judged primarily by middle or upper class intellectuals and readers. Many of their novels were published by the Left Book Club and they often found themselves caught up in the controversy over what constituted revolutionary writing that filled the pages of the Left press. Walter Brierley's novel *Means Test Man*, for example, reviewed in *The Daily Worker* in 1935, receives praise for communicating the mental and spiritual anguish of unemployment to an audience unfamiliar with it but is nevertheless charged with embourgeoisement because it fails to bring out the fighting spirit of the unemployed. And Gwyn Thomas' novel *Sorrow for thy Sons* was rejected by Gollancz because, as he advised, "some of the physical descriptions were so realistic as to produce actual nausea" and that "as your audience will be 99% tender-stomached, you will frighten them all away if you write in this fashion" (Miles and Smith, 1987: 153-154). The controversy continues to the present about whether such novels as Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist*, Walter Greenwood's

Love on the Dole and Lewis Grassic Gibbons, *A Scots Quair*, are genuinely proletarian novels (see Swingewood, 1977; Johnson, 1978; Wolmark, 1981).

There were some Leftists in Britain who followed a more Trotskyist line and upheld the importance of cultural continuity in the transition to socialism with ideas that had an undeniable Leavisian ring to them (Leavis himself had actually praised Trotsky's continuist view of the transition from bourgeois to 'human' culture but condemned him for falling back on a materialist notion of culture thus laying socialist society open to the same danger from mass culture as capitalist society). The writers who fell into this category advocated retaining the literature of the past and insisted upon standards which would encourage the "full rigour of the language." They were concerned with the lack of intellectual rigour of those who claimed to be doing Marxist literary criticism. The idea that a piece of writing that contained revolutionary ideals was necessarily good socialist literature, was condemned as inimical to the construction of a socialist literary canon (*Left Review*, 1, No. 5, 1935).

Leftist writers' and critics' response to the phenomenon of mass culture in the 1920s and 1930s was characterised by their almost total refusal to accept or engage with any form of leisure pursuit that was associated with commercial culture. Articles appeared periodically in *Plebs*, attacking the role of the wireless, the cinema, the bourgeois theatre and the press as agents of capitalist propaganda, feeding the workers seductive dope (Shiach, 1989). Hostility was also expressed towards Hollywood cinema and its trashy romances which, it was claimed, induced a state of stupor in the audience (Bond, 1979). One member of the British Section of The Writer's International urged that

writers "give a precise and cogent meaning to the abused word 'civilisation'" threatened by the "pretentious humbug of democratic culture as represented by popular fiction, film, etc." (*Left Review*, 1, No. 5, 1935: 180). Although revolutionary cinema in the Soviet Union was looked upon more favourably, there was nevertheless a clearly stated preference on the part of writers for the transformative powers of poetry and literature.

The one form of popular culture that was deemed capable by Left intellectuals of representing the workers and their interests was the theatre. In the thirties, under the rubric of the Workers' Theatre Movement (WTM) various companies were formed like The Group Theatre (of whom Auden was a member), Unity theatre, The Left Theatre and the Glasgow Workers' Theatre Group. However, while all of the companies were committed to 'socialist theatre,' they interpreted this notion rather differently. For Scottish playwright Joe Corrie, for example, theatre was a representation of the 'tradition' of the 'common people.' Similarly, Unity Theatre's aim was to "carry on the tradition dating back to the earliest time" when theatre was "a part of not separated from the life and ideals of the people." Meanwhile other companies experimented with Brechtian or agit-prop theatre taking the theatre to parks and political rallies and performing satirical sketches against the National Government in street clothes (Shiach, 1989).

Generally speaking, British Left intellectuals in the 1930s took their cue from their Soviet counterparts in attempting to create the terms for a specifically 'proletarian' culture. This entailed their adoption of several beliefs and assumptions regarding the class nature of culture and cultural products. It led to their insistence on a homogeneous working class culture that would be fully realised and

come to dominate through the overthrow of capitalism in a certain predictable way—thus negating the possibility of *mixed* realities within working class culture or any degree of overlap between bourgeois and proletarian cultures, particularly in the face of the influence of mass culture. Within literary circles, this notion was played out by writers, critics, editors and publishers who assumed the role of determining the authenticity of working class/proletarian writing through divergent sets of their own criteria, e. g., whether a text reflected the class struggle or the struggle against fascism, whether the working classes were depicted with a revolutionary class consciousness, whether characters communicated in their own dialects (the ones who swore, gambled and drank were considered truly representative of their class) and the extent to which workers ceased to embody bourgeois values. This preoccupation with authenticity, furthermore, led to a predisposition towards realist texts as those most able to represent proletarian social relations and values.

In the 1930s, Leavis' concern for the democratisation of culture was antithetical to the ultimate goal of the Left—a utopian socialist society in which a 'proletarian' culture would replace 'high' culture as the dominant cultural expression. Leavis' campaign to form a collective sensibility amongst a community of readers—through the reading of high cultural texts—was not deemed compatible with this agenda. Leavis sought to make culture 'commensurable' by claiming the collaborative and creative possibilities within language itself to establish common access to meanings that were not class or culture bound. His appeal to a 'point of view above classes,' however, was incompatible with the agenda of both conservatives and radicals of that period. Paradoxically, the Left, in opposing Leavis' agenda and

emphasising the strengthening of 'proletarian' culture as the workers' alternative to high culture, ended up aligned with Eliot and his commitment to the idea of incommensurability. Conservatives like Eliot had embraced the idea of incommensurability as a reason to keep the class system intact and membership to high culture limited. The efforts of the Left to promote working class writers and working class themes, though they helped to legitimate working class culture, simultaneously served this conservative interest. In the end, the Left's efforts on behalf of working class culture encouraged the maintenance of class divisions, particularly because, in practice, the production of proletarian literature and/or literature with socially real 'proletarian' themes was not accompanied by a challenge to the traditional canon itself. Marxists like Auden and Spender, for example, continued to generate and establish their own poems, novels and essays within the traditional high cultural canons to which they, by virtue of their social class origins, remained unquestionably attached.

While the participants in the culture debates of the 1920s and 1930s differed markedly amongst themselves in terms of their political and ideological aims or beliefs, they were nonetheless united in their interest in specifying the conditions under which a particular culture could flourish within the increasing climate of economic individualism in Britain. All were concerned to develop the *cultural* means that had to be in place in order to combat the influx and effect of mass culture. They were all also concerned to broaden the categories of what constituted legitimate culture, although conservatives like Eliot were not interested in broadening class access to these categories. Some on the Left were committed to the maintenance of class-based cultures within a *classless* society, and none questioned their own role as a

vanguard or a minority culture in determining what was or was not legitimately proletarian. The paradoxes that emerged, and that were not easily reconciled, amongst these competing concerns in the 1930s, particularly the inherent contradictions in a leftist incommensurability argument, would reappear in slightly different form, as the interrelationship of class, culture and cultural products continued to be discussed in the period following the second World War when the range of participants in the debates underwent an important transformation.

Chapter Three

The Culture Debates in the 1950s and 1960s

The New Cultural Critics

When the culture debates re-emerged in post-war Britain, many of the issues which had featured in the debates in the 1920s and 1930s reappeared—but this time within a more established and elaborated welfare state with some key social reforms having addressed the major problems of poverty and unemployment. If at the beginning of the fifties, however, it appeared to politicians in both parties that a social revolution had occurred, by the middle of the decade, it was clear that this was not the case. Just as the nation seemed to be restored to order (and as far as many Tories were concerned the old order), signs of dissent and discontent began to surface from within divergent segments of the population. Some of this dissatisfaction was motivated by an increasing distrust that old Tory values were making a comeback under Churchill's ageing government. A major catalyst for this dissent, however, was the breakdown of the class and social structure that had resulted from post-war social and economic reforms (Addison, 1985; Howarth, 1985; Sissons and French, 1986). Suburbanisation and the construction of massive urban housing estates had altered patterns of family and community life and educational restructuring had begun to have an impact on social mobility and inter-generational relationships within families. Moreover, the 'coming of affluence' of the 1950s became the gateway to the new technological age of motorways, supermarkets, televisions and fully automated assembly lines of the 1960s which also contributed

significantly to the transformation of social and cultural relations (Booker, 1969; Sinfield, 1989).

Due to the social shifts that had taken place since the war, the lines had become blurred with regard to who could say what constituted 'culture' of whatever kind. Participants in the culture debates in the 1950s and 1960s included: a newly constructed 'literary elite,' which contained a mixture of conservative and progressive elements and included members from diverse class backgrounds; the continued influence of the Leavises' literary criticism and critique of mass culture, though there were attempts to adapt Leavisism to post-war social realities; the members of the New Left who attempted to reconstruct a radical theory of culture and society in light of post-war developments, and in particular, to reconsider the relationship between mass culture and class culture under capitalism; and the producers and consumers of mass culture who felt the need to defend their 'art' to the cultural critics. The debates also continued to be influenced by an expanding literature on mass culture from both Europe and the United States and an already existing literature from the Frankfurt School, many of whose members had found temporary refuge in the United States during the war.

Some of the first signs of discontent in the post-war era came from the southern suburbs of London's working class sectors by way of the 'teddy boys' in around 1953. The forerunners of the trend of post-war youth sub-cultures that would appear in Britain, they expropriated the style of the Edwardian upper class to express their alienation with that class and their resentment at being "left out of the upward mobility of post-war British affluence" (Brake, 1985: 73). Deprived of access to better jobs and grammar school educations, they responded,

sometimes violently, by cultivating a cultural territory of their own in snack-bars and cinemas accompanied by fifties style rock and roll (Melly, 1972; Bedarida, 1979; Bennett, et. al, 1981). But while the teddy boys remained a 'subcultural' group, other members of the working classes emerged who began to challenge the dominant culture of the mid-fifties from within. Most of them were first generation recipients of grammar school educations, the products of post-war social reforms which had included an expanding educational sector that attempted to introduce a system based on merit rather than birth. Particularly relevant to the culture debates were the novelists, poets and playwrights from the upwardly mobile urban working classes who began to appear on the scene, introducing themes of working class and lower middle class life, making these legitimate subject-matter for literature, the theatre and the cinema. In contrast to the proletarian novelists of the thirties, with some exceptions, these writers spoke by, for and about themselves. In novels like Colin MacInnes, *Absolute Beginners*, Alan Sillitoe's, *The Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner*, and *Saturday Night Sunday Morning*, and David Storey's, *This Sporting Life*, and plays like Shelagh Delaney's, *A Taste of Honey*, Arnold Wesker's, *Roots*, John Osborne's, *Look Back in Anger*, and Keith Waterhouse's, *Billy Liar*, for example, working and lower middle class life was portrayed to middle class audiences, while simultaneously often dealing ambiguously with the social future of the protagonists.

Other 'Movement' writers who appeared on the literary scene in the 1950s, Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, John Wain and John Braine amongst them, were not so much interested in legitimating working class culture as in carving out a space for the legitimacy of their own

independent judgements in the face of the traditional literary elite and the modernist trends of the previous decades. Theirs was a rebellion against the traditional elite but not necessarily a challenge to the very notion of middle class, bourgeois culture. They adopted a stance which was at once class conscious and accepting of class divisions, combining "subversive irreverence" with "a fantasy for social advance" (Booker, 1969). These tensions are played out in their novels and poems where nostalgia, conservatism, cowardice and compromise are characteristics commonly found in the protagonists (Rabinowitz, 1967; Morrison, 1980; Stevenson, 1986; Bradbury, 1988).

Reactions to the emerging social and political formations in post-war 1950's Britain were not limited to rebellious youth groups and a newly constituted literati, however. The seeds of a more broadly focused new radicalism also emerged in Britain at this time which evolved into the New Left. Made up primarily of intellectuals and academics, the New Left were committed to "the clarification and definition of theory as a precondition of mass political action" (Inglis, 1982: 177).¹ In the pages of the *New Left Review*, this group of ex-

¹ There was increasing hostility, expressed in political terms, toward the British government's international policies spurred on by the Eden government's decision in 1956 to send troops to overthrow Nasser in response to the nationalization of the Suez Canal. Members of 'the bomb generation' saw Suez as representative of their government's desire for economic expansion at any cost and associated the action with cold war 'atomic bomb' style politics. In 1958, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) was formed as a symbol of resistance to government policy on atomic warfare. CND and The Committee of 100 (an arm of the organization which advocated civil disobedience) were influential in both bringing to public attention the realities of nuclear war and making the issue of unilateral disarmament a political one that neither party could ignore. The organization, sponsored and supported by aristocrats, students, artists and politicians alike, replaced the influence of the Labour Party and (to a lesser extent) the Communist Party on middle class intellectuals; both parties had begun to lose credibility, the former because its socialist agenda had been abandoned in favor of 'Establishment' political solutions and the latter due to Soviet policy and the invasion of Hungary (Ryder and Silver, 1977).

communists and socialists, some of whom had been activists since the thirties, attempted to reconstitute their ideological position following the Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary and in the face of the increasing reformist tendencies of the Labour Party. As Inglis recalls,

For all those persuaded by total war that socialism was desirable and possible, the same light was dreadfully dimmed by Stalinism. If we take 1956 as the point of departure for what came to be known as the New Left, then its significant moment was the moment of Suez and Budapest. All that was gradually being learned about Stalinist Russia by that date was thrown into hideous relief as the champions of socialist freedom shot the socialist insurrections of Hungary and Poland to pieces with tanks. At the same time Old Corruption at home had lied in its teeth to Parliament and the Allies, and launched the ludicrous adventure of the Suez landings. Eden's and MacMillan's governments were bound tightly into the lies of the Cold War, the deadly race for ever more ruinous weaponry, the grudging extension of a capital-dependent independence to the colonial territories. These were the signs of the times, and signs were taken for wonders. It was time for new signs and images, if not for theories (Inglis, 1982: 159).

Some of these new signs and images came by way of the visual arts world, which by the 1960s, had witnessed the arrival of 'pop' art. The spread and success of pop culture throughout British society provoked a significant shift in the post-war culture debates. Its undeniable relationship to mass culture, and eventually high culture, forced a reassessment of the universal rejection of mass/popular culture that had characterised the debates in the 1920s and 1930s. One of the earlier attempts to question the cultural significance of pop art came from a group which formed in the early fifties and called itself the Independent Group. Among its members was Richard Hamilton whose famous 1956 collage, *Just What is it that Makes Today's Homes so Different, so Appealing?*, expressed a fascination with the products coming out of urban popular culture, especially from the United States



(Lucie-Smith, 1989), while at the same time implying a certain irony. The discussions held by members of this group included many of the themes already evident in the culture debates. This time, however, the backdrop was a modernising society, more enthusiastic about the products of mass culture across all class and cultural lines. As Melly recalls,

[They] began to meet regularly at the Dover Street premises of the I.C.A. to discuss what Mario Amaya has defined as "...the paradox of the creative individual in a mass-think society." At first this activity seems to have been an attempt to resurrect the concept of the artist as a Universal Man in the context of an increasingly complex civilisation, and with this in mind various aspects of science and technology, philosophy and linguistics were discussed side by side with such "debased" forms of popular culture as American comic books; but as the majority of the group were artists, they found their interest more and more centred on the despised aesthetics of a society geared for profit and turn-over, and in particular with the mass-produced dream which had evolved to help sell the ever growing flood of products and objects: the lumpen-fantasy world of long-limbed compliant girls, fast cars, penthouses, streamlined violence and neon lights reflected in private swimming pools. Almost accidentally the group had brought to light a potent myth (Melly, 1970: 13-14).

Significantly, it was in the context of debating this "potent myth" of mass culture that discussions about the continuing role for literature and literary criticism would take place in the post-war period.

The Role of Literature and Culture—the Debates Revisited

The Old and New Literary Elite

After World War II several divergent groups of novelists and poets emerged to form what would become by the end of the 1950s a new/old literary elite. There was the 'old'—i. e. those who had been writing since before the war—elite, which included writers like Evelyn Waugh, Anthony Powell, William Plomer and Angela Thirkell, whose

responses to the post-war restructuring of society varied from resignation to resistance. From Waugh's classic, *Brideshead Revisited*, to Thirkell's more populist, *Private Enterprise*, the characters in their novels looked back regretfully to the established order that was no more. Like Eliot, they were of the opinion that the traditional class system had served a necessary function and that "to muddle it up, as was happening, was only to confuse the system that sorted out, as it were, which human letter should go into which social envelope" (Pryce-Jones, 1986: 204).

There were also figures from the old 'radical' elite like Graham Greene and George Orwell who, though they continued to explore social and intellectual phenomena, had been unalterably affected by the war. The effects were clearly present in their writing which tended to prophesy gloom and a sense of collapse, as in Orwell's, *1984*, and Greene's, *Heart of the Matter*. The war and developments under the Soviet system, changed their relationship (and that of others from the Auden-Spender group) to Marxism and also changed their attitude towards the political responsibility of the writer. Greene converted to Catholicism and Orwell, as early as 1940, in his influential essay, "Inside the Whale," expressed disillusion with the Left and a growing fear of totalitarianism. He concluded by advocating quietism, "robbing reality of its terror simply by submitting to it" (Orwell, 1957: 48).

The newest members of the literary elite came from the group of working class and lower middle class writers and poets referred to above. These writers (with some exceptions) rejected the modernist texts of Virginia Woolf or James Joyce in favour of the type of realism and concern for social and moral themes found in 19th century British novels. William Cooper, whose 1950 novel, *Scenes from a Provincial*

Life, has been considered a major influence on many of these novelists (and whose title recalls George Eliot's, *Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life*), emphatically rejected the "Experimental novel" because of its stress on "Man-alone" rather than "Man-in-Society" (Stevenson, 1986: 129-130). Although Cooper went so far as to suggest that the romantics, existentialists and modernists made "the ripest meat for authoritarianism and then totalitarianism," most of this new group of writers rejected these traditions on aesthetic and philosophical grounds, not political ones (Rabinowitz, 1967: 31). Influenced by A. J. Ayer at Oxford and Wittenstein at Cambridge, many of these writers submitted to a belief in logical positivism, which had strong English roots, against the existentialism of the Continent. They considered the fictional and poetic themes presented through logical analysis and rationalism socially more progressive than the visions of chaos and anarchy found in much modernist writing (Rabinowitz, 1967: 31)

In general, the novelists and poets who emerged in the 1950s were distinctly uninterested in questioning in political terms (Marxist or otherwise) the relationship between literature and society. This is not to suggest that the writers who emerged during this period never engaged in political activity or included political themes in their work. Many of them, for example, participated in the CND movement. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that Orwell's disillusionment with the Left was a major influence in determining their attitudes towards politics—that they felt themselves to be more politically mature and "not so starry-eyed" as the Marxists of the 1930s (Rabinowitz, 1967: 32). This attitude, however, has equally been seen as designed primarily to serve an already strong conservative impulse in the group (Morrison, 1980: 96); and that, in spite of their 'angry' images, many of these

writers were actually backward looking, tied to the traditional overarching class structure of Britain and desirous of assimilation "into the ideal pattern of the old intellectual class" (Shils, 1955: 15). The following remarks made by Kingsley Amis in 1960 are illustrative of just how angry he was,

When I look back on the Fifties, I can see, despite the quarts of adrenaline they made me release at times, small cause for complaint in matters affecting me personally. The world of letters, into which I finally contrived to infiltrate, proved benign, not at all in the grip of that "London literary racket" I had heard so much about before I got there. It contains, to be sure, some persons of more influence than ability, but however "disquieting" their existence may be, they have never done me any harm that I know of. And, starting off as a non-Etonian without acquaintances in that world, I found it a surprisingly easy one to move about in (Amis, 1960: 10).

In 1955, in response to an article in *Encounter* in which Edward Shils calls British intellectuals to task for being too "at ease with the symbols of sovereign authority," John Wain (named in the article as one of the guilty), agrees that what Shils had written was "incontestably true." A large part of the problem, they concur, is the continued dominance of the Oxbridge-London circles of influence and the failure of the intellectual community to bestow equal status on the 'redbrick' provincial universities in spite of their high standards. Wain discusses "the English tendency to equate 'culture' with education and social status" and suggests that out of the many undergraduates enrolled at Oxford and Cambridge "perhaps more than half are consciously using the university as a means of crossing the fence from one class to another." He concludes that, "the more able members of the working and lower middle classes are diverted from the task of creating a 'culture' which would reflect the milieu from which they came"

(Wain, 1955: 68).² Thus, in spite of tensions within the culture and the impact of working and lower middle class representation within literary circles, ultimately old and new members gradually came together in a replenishment of a literary elite.

It would be wrong to suggest that all of the new writers were equally willing to join or were welcome in established literary circles, however. A certain tension can be noted, for example, in a review of Alan Sillitoe's work in a piece for the *New Statesman* written in 1961. In what is written as a favourable review of Sillitoe's success in "making the deprived something better than unthinkable," there are nevertheless undertones of class positioning in comments like "...What hindsight allows is that the book's main achievement was to have caught and rendered a class context unfamiliar to most readers and writers of novels," "Mr. Sillitoe is best when he keeps to the realities of his background," "Mr. Sillitoe's novel doesn't satisfy one's habitual demands on the genre: organisation, direction, a denouement of sorts," and finally, "This is the kind of tiresome allegory that Rex Warner used to confound us with and in Mr. Sillitoe's hands it is even less satisfying, demanding as it does a quality of intellectual stamina that he notably lacks." (Coleman, 1961). Similarly, works by playwrights like Shelagh Delaney, Joan Littlewood, and Keith Waterhouse were criticised in the mainstream press (Hunt, 1961).

² The insidious effects of the class system on many of the 'Movement' writers is most apparent when one considers how they became positioned within their own critiques of class. For example, it has been suggested that their attempts to attack upper middle class pretentiousness often appear more as attacks on the aping of upper middle class values by the provincial bourgeoisie, of which many of them were members. Moreover, in attacking the cosmopolitanism of the upper middle classes in their novels, they adopted an insular 'little England' attitude for themselves which made them appear to be closed off to anything foreign, particularly European. Thus, social values like elitist culture and metropolitan patronizing of the provinces were ultimately preserved (Morrison, 1986).

During this period there was one important attempt, through Arnold Wesker's Centre 42, to challenge the assimilationist tendencies described above and to engage art with politics. Wesker, one of the group of Left working class playwrights to emerge after the war, was concerned that although post-war reforms had made it possible for more members of the public to engage in cultural activities, people, and in particular the working classes, needed to become aware of the relevance of the arts in their everyday lives. He was also aware of the reality that his work and that of others like him was becoming either co-opted or marginalised by the established literary elite and, in both cases, defused of its 'revolutionising' potential. For Wesker, the only hope of avoiding this was to radically alter the means by which art was produced, supported and distributed within society. In order to achieve this aim he brought together a network that included artists, trade unionists and Labour politicians who supported his vision of bridging the gap between the production of artistic works and their reception in working communities all over England.

Wesker's campaign, however, quickly found itself entangled in the question of what rightly constituted culture in a post-war society in which the meaning of terms like 'high brow,' 'popular,' 'middle brow,' 'mass,' 'pop' and 'working class' culture had become unclear. Wesker, while stressing the not-for-profit aspect of his project, showed a preference for what traditionally was considered high art or traditional popular art while expressing a disdain for pop culture. As he remarked in a lecture in Birmingham in 1966, where he presented himself as an artist and a playwright "not a theoretician:"

The society in which we live belongs to the Beatles not to Prokofiev. No matter how much you know that the depths

stirred in you by a Prokoviev violin concerto are more profound than those stirred by a Beatles lament yet you cannot say this. You cannot say this because the moment you state your preference you immediately challenge the personality of the person whose preference you do not share...In a discussion I once had with two of the world's top pop singers one of them compared the value of their music to the value of Shakespeare. What kind of self-confident immodesty is abroad that encourages a pop singer to make such comparisons? And what language do we have with which to confront his claim? (Wesker, 1966: 4).

Wesker's cultural 'judgements' did not go unnoticed by some members of the Left who accused him of "playing the bourgeois game," "indoctrinating the working classes with 'Higher Forms of Art'," "imposing his own values on the underprivileged" and "operating with a bourgeois concept of culture" (Coppetiers, 1975). Wesker, however, saw himself as battling against what he perceived (with Leavis-like conviction) as the trade unions increasing collusion with capitalism and the mass culture industry and the increasing commodification of art in the age of mass culture.³ Moreover, since Wesker's anti-capitalist sentiments made him seem hostile to the Tory government's Minister of the Arts, Centre 42 found itself open to criticism from conservatives as well. He and Centre 42 thus fell victim

³ Initially, Wesker's proposal for a Centre which would serve as "a cultural hub, which by its approach and work, will destroy the mystique and snobbery associated with the arts" received the endorsement of the trade unions whose support was considered crucial for making it a truly grassroots endeavor (Deller, 1961; Coppetiers, 1975). Within a short time however, Wesker and his organization found themselves involved in political battles and financial troubles which undermined the ability of the Centre to accomplish its original aims. For example, despite support from local union groups, the TUC General Council failed to endorse Centre 42 as its sole cultural arm. Also, cooperation from the Arts Council was sporadic and their financial contributions remained minimal. In the end, the Centre increasingly found itself relying for funds on connections in the commercial sector or on members of the upper classes, the traditional patrons of the arts (Coppetiers, 1975). The result was that, as Coppetiers suggests, "a project which had intended to enable artists and producers to own the means of their livelihood was increasingly being governed by the criterion of profit, with the producers as simple employees" (Coppetiers, 1975: 48).

to tensions in the post-war period between the restructuring of society, on the one hand, and the redefinition of culture on the other, leaving important questions about the role of art and the artist in society unresolved.

Leavisism

During the post-war period, Leavis and *Scrutiny* continued to have an impact in the British literary world and, increasingly, in the United States. Although *Scrutiny's* regular readership expanded as did the number of contributors, the inner circle of the 1930s began to disband, either as a consequence of the war, due to commitments elsewhere, or in the case of Q. D. Leavis, when illness prevented her from continuing. The cultural community so essential to 'the critical revolution' thus began to weaken and two tendencies emerged in the journal during this period—one liberal and modern the other conservative and regressive (Hayman, 1976; Mulhern, 1981). More importantly however, the social and economic shifts that had occurred since the war provided a very different backdrop for the Leavises' efforts on behalf of standards in criticism and against the effects of mass culture and industrialisation. As a consequence, Leavis (and *Scrutiny*) found themselves in several paradoxical situations.

First, in contrast to the 1930s when the Leavises had stood outside of the literary elite, they now found themselves a part of it, yet they continued to view it with hostility. The "rebellion of the Lower Middle Brows" (Stephen Spender's swipe at the class background of the new literary elite), which they themselves had participated in, was felt to have been achieved by the middle of the 1950s. The novelists, poets and critics who became prominent in the 1950s no longer came

predominantly from the upper classes—the dominance of the Bloomsbury group and of the Auden-Spender line was overturned in favour of the celebration of "the values of little-British decency" and the "rise of provincialism"—both of which were at the heart of the Leavisite call for cultural continuity (see Bradbury, 1956; Green, 1959). In spite of this seeming victory however, Leavis was unimpressed by what he considered the mere replacement of one metropolitan literary clique for another. He criticised members of the new literary elite for their lack of rigour and failure to resist the discontinuities in standards of literature of the past with those of the present. To members of the literati, Leavis appeared to be attempting to slay a dragon that had already been slain. In their view, the challenge to the 'highbrow' culture of the old elite from the 'middlebrow' culture of a new elite had for all intents and purposes been accomplished. Furthermore, they questioned the idea that it was possible to judge contemporary literature by the standards of literature that had survived from the past. By the end of the decade, the Leavises and *Scrutiny* were already considered in certain literary circles a thing (albeit of value) of the past (Watson, 1977; Mulhern, 1981; Bradbury, 1988 and see *Critical Quarterly*, 1959; 245-257). 'The function of criticism' as defined by Leavis had served its purpose. As Mulhern suggests,

[Leavis] had inherited the humanism of "the intellectual aristocracy" but not its patrician ease; he asserted a specific and normative Englishness but was still too much a "cosmopolitan" to settle for the gnawing, cheated chauvinism of Little England. Leavisian discourse in its high period—the *Scrutiny* years—cannot be assimilated either to the old, imperial literary culture or to its "provincial" successor: its distinctive shape was that of the transition between them (Mulhern, 1990: 262).

Leavis' insistence on a lead role for a university-educated intellectual vanguard also proved incongruous with post-war social realities. As early as 1943 in *"Education and the University: A Sketch for an English School"* Leavis had laid out his vision of an interdisciplinary liberal education programme for the English Tripos at Cambridge which would provide a training in "sensibility and intelligence together." The programme reiterated the importance of an elite who would "check and control the blind drive onwards of material and mechanical development, with its human consequences" (Leavis, 1943). However, by the 1940s and increasingly during the 1950s, a campaign *against* the "blind drive onwards" was itself blind to the attitudes emerging in Britain. Both social and economic policy were being shaped around the idea of social planning and economic efficiency for the new technological age (Ryder and Silver, 1977). In the context of a modernising, technologising society, Leavis' continued concern for and defence of culture began to sound at best quixotic and at worst an Eliot-like form of elitism (the largely negative reaction to Leavis' critical response to the printed version of C. P. Snow's 1959 lecture, *The Two Cultures*, is illustrative of the general attitude towards Leavis amongst many intellectuals at the time (see Hayman, 1976: 111-118; this debate will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four).

Likewise, while Leavis continued to talk about the negative impact of mass culture, others—including many radicals who in the 1930s would have shared this view—were beginning to reconsider aspects of it. As suggested earlier, the emergence of 'pop' culture in the 1950s and 1960s had forced a reconsideration of their attitudes toward culture in general and mass culture in particular, and in the process,

arguments against mass culture began to get rearticulated. Organisations like the National Union of Teachers and government-sponsored educational studies like the Nuffield Report (1958), the Crowther Report (1959) and the Pilkington Report (1962) began to include analysis and commentary on such themes as 'popular culture and personal responsibility,' 'the mass media' and 'television and the child' (Hall and Whannel, 1964). While most of the studies were conservative in tone, advising caution as to the value and effects of mass culture, they nevertheless acknowledged mass culture as a major influence in British society in general, and on young people in particular. In this context, many Leavisites, with their continued attention to notions like 'tradition,' 'cultural heritage' and 'minority culture,' began to sound defensive and nostalgic. Moreover, since their preoccupation with the erosion of cultural authority and their call for a minority culture were *linked* to the deleterious effects of mass culture on British society, when mass culture began to penetrate and be accepted in the lives of the majority of people, their claims in general began to carry less and less weight.

In spite of growing antagonism towards Leavis during this period however, his ideas continued to inform the culture debates and influence the direction which they took. The textbook, *Culture and Environment*, which Leavis and Denys Thompson had written in 1933 as a basis for training in discrimination in secondary schools continued to have a powerful impact on secondary school teachers with its conviction that literature was the central humanising experience and that critical discrimination should be seen as a morally educative experience (Mathieson, 1975: 138-139). His influence also continued to be felt within certain circles of the New Left. Figures like

Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, for example, in attempting to theorise the relationship between politics and culture, relied on certain categories developed within Leavisian aesthetics and criticism (Hoggart, 1957; Williams, 1958; Watson, 1977; Mulhern, 1981). However, it was also within these same circles that Leavis' contribution to the practice of criticism was gradually perceived as no longer relevant to the concerns of contemporary cultural studies. Some of the reasons for this have been discussed above: his reluctance to accept the inevitability of mass culture; his call for an educated minority; and his criticism of contemporary literary culture. However, other reasons must be considered that arose from attempts *within* Leftist circles to construct a theory of culture and society in the post-war era and a literary criticism that was compatible with its agenda.

The New Left

The New Left, in addition to its interest in national and international economic and political issues, attempted to articulate a theory that dealt with culture and society. Like members of the British Left of the 1930s, its members turned their attention to exploring the relationship between culture, capitalism and class—though this time without the Soviet Union as a model and within the context of the welfare state. Like the Leftists of the 1930s, however, similar tensions and contradictions emerged in the construction of such a theory—and in turning theory into practice as Wesker's attempts suggest—particularly since by the 1950s and increasingly in the 1960s, mass culture was something that all classes, including the working classes, were in a position to produce as well as to buy.

The New Left emerged in the mid-fifties at a time when events occurring nationally and internationally forced members of the Left to re-evaluate their political theories and allegiances. During this period, a space emerged for discussion and debate of Marxist theory in general, and the relationship between literature and society within a Marxian framework in particular. Some of the challenges which arose for the British New Left within these debates were: to theorise the relationship between class, culture and politics under capitalism; to explore the revolutionary potential (or lack thereof) of a mass culture in capitalist society; and to re-examine Marxism with respect to the function of literature (and art in general) in society.

One of the main issues that had arisen within Marxist theory during this period centred around clarifying and refining Marx's distinction between the economic or material base and the superstructural phenomena of a given society. The aim was to better define the relationship between these two, and the question of the relative autonomy of superstructural phenomena like art, music and especially literature found its way into the culture debates in Britain as well. Whereas the Marxism that had informed the debates about literature in the 1930s had reflected the tendencies of that period toward a fairly simplistic, deterministic understanding of the base/superstructure relationship, by the 1960s this relationship was understood by the British New Left to be more complex, due in large part to the increasing availability of and interest in the writings of European Marxists. By the 1960s key works by European Marxists as diverse as Althusser, Gramsci, Lukacs, Goldmann, Adorno, Benjamin and Brecht began to have a decisive influence.

Two key figures, Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, played a formative role in defining the direction taken by the culture debates within the Left in the 1950s and beyond in Britain. Initially, at least, they relied on categories from literary criticism of the Leavisian kind in theorising the relationship between literature and society. Hoggart's influential, *The Uses of Literacy*, which appeared in 1957 brought Leavis' method of practical criticism out of a purely 'literary' culture and applied it to the culture of a community, and more specifically, the working class community in which Hoggart had been raised. Intended in part as a critique of the impact of mass culture on the working class way of life, the book was the first of a new trend in cultural and literary studies to emphasise personal experience and then to theorise that, i. e., "to treat social life as a literary text and to revise the valuation of that life then in genteel circulation" (Inglis, 1982: 163). Just as Leavis had advocated reading a literary text for the values and meanings it embodied, so Hoggart set out to 'read' his working class community for its lived culture, as enacted in the arrangements of everyday living. While some have seen his approach as ultimately one which superficialised and depoliticised proletarian culture along the lines of Orwell's, *Road to Wigan Pier* (Swingewood, 1977: 58-59), Hoggart's approach has also been identified as an important breakthrough in dispensing with the high culture/popular culture divide (Bennett, et. al., 1981). For in providing a model for 'criticism' of cultural forms other than those traditionally associated with high culture, *The Uses of Literacy* "renamed the ordinary to make it once again the fabulous" (Inglis, 1982: 168) and in the process, problematised the very constitution of culture. Ironically, while it pointed to a role beyond the literary world for Leavisian criticism, it simultaneously

served as an indictment of traditional Leavisian criticism for limiting the cultural forms worthy of scrutiny. At the same time however, judged within the terms of a Marxist aesthetic theory, Hoggart's approach did not go far enough for it failed to locate the specific social and historical determinations of his working class 'text.' Thus, while his project to legitimate forms of working class culture was a radical departure from traditional literary criticism (and helped establish what would become the new movement in Cultural Studies), the task of situating literary culture within an explicitly Marxian framework remained.

During this time, Raymond Williams had already begun what would develop into a lifelong 'dialogue' with Marxism.⁴ Within the climate of struggle and negotiation over the very definition(s) of culture he, along with other participants in the culture debates, began searching for a *theory* of culture within which to situate and defend their claims (while Williams was undeniably one of the main figures during this period who attempted to discuss culture within a Marxist framework, he was part of a general trend amongst the British New Left to try to incorporate several (often divergent) strands of European Marxism into British social and cultural theory). Williams' book, *Culture and Society*, which appeared in 1958 was an important contribution to the discussions of culture and class that emerged in this

⁴ Williams 'dialogue' was largely with himself for much of the period of the 1940s and early 1950s (see Hoggart and Williams, 1960; Thompson, 1961 and Williams, 1977). As far as members of the literary elite were concerned, they were turning away from Marxism and from the Continent as sources of inspiration or influence. It was with the emergence of the New Left in the mid-fifties that Williams found a home and it in turn found an unofficial leader of sorts. This is not to suggest that Williams' work was taken up uncritically by his supporters on the Left. E. P. Thompson, for example, in a review of, *The Long Revolution*, which Williams published in the early sixties, took him to task for understating the importance of the class struggle in his analysis of culture (see Thompson, 1961).

post-war context. In Britain, few other theories of literature and society emerged during this period to challenge those being developed by Williams and others via Marxist theory. The literary reviews and academic literary journals, for example, were not dedicated to developing explicit theories of literature. And Leavisism had always been by its very nature idiosyncratic, not grounded in any explicit theory or principle but instead based on individual responses to the language of literature. In contrast to the 1930s when a Leavisian aesthetic was deemed more rigorous than the predominant Marxist one—in *spite of* his refusal to ground his practice in any particular theory—in the 1960s the anti-theoretical nature of his criticism contributed to its increasingly marginalised status. Williams, by then a Marxist, sought to develop a version of a Marxist aesthetic theory to inform and critique the tradition of literary criticism in Britain. His interests were gradually taken up by certain Left intellectuals who viewed his attempt to 'socially situate' literature as an important contribution toward their post-war efforts to redefine the role of high culture, working class culture, mass culture and the 'tradition.' Williams, in conversation with Richard Hoggart in 1960, expressed the need for such redefinition in a tone which conveys a sense of *personal* urgency,

...Getting the tradition right was getting myself right, and that meant changing both myself and the usual version of the tradition. I think this is one of the problems we're both conscious of; moving out of a working class home into an academic curriculum, absorbing it first and then later, trying to get the two experiences into relation (Hoggart and Williams, 1960: 26).

In order to initiate a change from the "usual version of the tradition," Williams turned to Marxist literary critics, Georg Lukacs and

Lucien Goldmann. Both Lukacs and later Goldmann used the notion of a "world vision"—which Goldmann defined as "the whole complex of ideas, aspirations and feelings which links together the members of a social group (a group which in most cases assumes the existence of a social class) and which opposes them to members of other social groups"—to evaluate literary texts (Goldmann, 1964: 17). According to Goldmann, the value of a literary work could be determined by an author's ability to successfully encapsulate the "collective group consciousness" of a particular historical moment within the internal structure of a text. Goldmann and Lukacs understood a particular historical moment to be defined by class struggle and both believed that a "world vision" was expressed only in "great" literature by those few "exceptional individuals who either actually achieve or come very near to achieving a completely integrated and coherent view of what they and the social class to which they belong are trying to do" (Goldmann, 1964: 17).

Lukacs believed in a rather mechanical correlation between literature and class/economic structures and considered great only those novels written prior to 1848, when the bourgeois writer was still a participant in the class struggle and not a reactionary opponent of the proletarian class. His critique of modernism was in part based on the belief that it reflected the decline of the bourgeoisie as a class engaged in struggle over material conditions. For Lukacs, only bourgeois realist writers like Balzac and Dickens succeeded in depicting 'types' in their novels—elements which synthesised "the general and the particular both in characters and in situations" (Lukacs, 1950: 6). Goldmann was open to a broader historical range of great works and more aware than Lukacs of viewing the literary text itself rather than society as the

starting point in literary criticism. He believed that the notion of a homology of *structures* rather than a mere reflection of *content* between the social 'totality' and literary texts was the key to literary analysis (Goldman, 1964: 89-102).

For Williams, Lukacs and Goldmann provided a theory of literature that situated a novel or poem in a social context and that identified organising principles, similar to his structures of feeling, by which a particular world view operated in consciousness. Acknowledging the influence of Goldmann on his thinking, Williams said,

...We should not then mainly study peripheral relations: correspondences of content and background; overtly social relations between writers and readers. We should study, in the greatest literature, the organising categories, the essential structures, which give works their unity, their specific aesthetic character, their strictly literary quality; and which at the same time reveal to us the maximum possible consciousness of the social group—in real terms, the social class—which finally created them, in and through their individual authors (Williams, 1971: 13).

In spite of Williams' early attempts to distance himself from traditional literary criticism however, only one notion distinguishes the above definition of literary criticism from Leavis' critical method—the appeal to a social class consciousness. Phrases like "the greatest literature," "specific aesthetic character," and "strictly literary quality" are categories found in Leavisian criticism. Moreover, neither Lukacs' nor Goldmann's literary criticism avoided one kind of 'elitism' often associated with Leavis' literary criticism in their preference for the 'great' literature of the past and dismissal of much contemporary literature (Glucksmann, 1979) especially given that their methods (at

least in Britain) were never made accessible to or practised by more than a 'critical minority' (Watson, 1977; Widdowson, 1982).

What made their theories so influential for Williams and the Left was that they implicitly called into question the legitimacy of Leavisian categories like continuity and tradition and replaced them with categories of historical materialism, in which change not constancy became key and social structure not tradition was made to inform critical analysis. Lukacs' and Goldmann's theories suggested an alternative to Leavis, for by stressing class consciousness and not 'a point of view above classes,' the notion of 'tradition,' was given a political and not, in their view as Leavis had perceived it, a metaphysical base.

Mulhern has critiqued the use of the concept of 'tradition' in Leavisism from a Marxist perspective. Drawing on the work of Goran Therborn (*Science, Class and Society*, 1976) he claims that Leavis' criticism actually represented two distinct theoretical discourses—the romantic exploration of "national culture" (*Volksgeist*) and classical sociology—for which the object of attention was "the community of customs, values and beliefs that was taken to form the essential unifying principle of society" (Mulhern, 1981: 310). Mulhern's critique of both discourses is that they deem the ultimate foundations of the social order to be spiritual, not political, in nature. He suggests that in Leavisism these foundations were incarnated in 'tradition' and found their sanctuary in literature.

But while it is true that Leavis expressed no political explication or implications for his use of 'tradition' as a category—hence opening himself up for dismissal and criticism by Marxists that its foundations were purely spiritual—notably absent from Mulhern's or Williams'

account of tradition is any mention of another group of Marxists, the Frankfurt School, who like Leavis, appealed to tradition in their critique of mass culture. While no attempt can be made here to elaborate on the complex and diverse aesthetic theories which came out of the Frankfurt School, it is worth noting certain aspects of their theories for they, like Leavis, believed in the importance of tradition as a force against the impact of the culture industry. As Jay states,

...the Institut, for all its Marxist tendencies, valued tradition...Adorno spoke of the traditional component in Schonberg's seemingly revolutionary music, and Benjamin considered tradition to be a part of an art work's aura...Lowenthal referred to continuity as the "criterion of love" an observation that followed on the heels of Horkheimer's assertion...that mass culture deprived man of his *duree* ...Tradition referred to the type of integrated experience the Institut members called *Erfahrung*, which was being destroyed by so-called progress (Jay, 1973: 215).

The Frankfurt School's understanding of 'tradition' was embedded in a dialectical or 'immanent' critique of works of art, literature, music, etc.. Art, according to Adorno, "...always was, and is, a force of protest of the humane against the pressure of domineering institutions, religious or otherwise, no less than it expresses objective substance." Furthermore, "a successful work, according to immanent criticism, is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure" (Jay, 1973: 179). 'Negation' was a key concept in the Frankfurt School's aesthetic theory. It referred, in a work of art, to "the communication of the incommunicable" and constituted "the smashing of reified consciousness" (Adorno in Slater, 1977: 134). The Frankfurt School's support for the avant-garde against

mass culture was based in part on this concept of 'negation'—for they believed that avant garde art succeeded in violating and disturbing people's consciousness, particularly the false consciousness manipulated and maintained by the culture industry. As Horkheimer claimed, "in giving downtrodden humans a shocking awareness of their own despair, the work of art professes a freedom which makes them foam at the mouth" (Slater, 1977: 134).

Like Leavis, members of the Frankfurt School were pessimistic about the masses desire (or ability) not to be manipulated—having witnessed the rise of Fascism and Nazism in their native Germany. As Adorno wrote to Benjamin,

...It is not bourgeois idealism if, in full knowledge and without mental prohibitions, we maintain our solidarity with the proletariat instead of making of our own necessity a virtue of the proletariat, as we are always tempted to do—the proletariat which itself experiences the same necessity and needs us for knowledge as much as we need the proletariat to make the revolution. I am convinced that the further development of the aesthetic debate which you have so magnificently inaugurated depends essentially on a true accounting of the relationship of the intellectuals to the working class (Adorno, 1977: 125).

This was in response to Benjamin's Brechtian influenced belief in art as a form of production or praxis—a social force in its own right rather than simply a reflector or reformer of consciousness. In contrast to Adorno (and other members of the Frankfurt School), Benjamin had a more optimistic belief in the liberatory role of technology and mechanical reproduction in capitalist society (Benjamin, 1970). Moreover, Benjamin was more inclined than Adorno to think that mass cultural products could be (as Brecht suggested) "functionally transformed" or "subverted" both by and in the interests of the

proletariat (Adorno, 1977: 122; and see Slater, 1977: 138; Jay, 1984: 123-126).

It is interesting to consider how these differing tendencies within the Frankfurt School (regarding the role of the masses, of intellectuals, of mass culture, of high art, of theory and of praxis) were taken up by the New Left in Britain. Without wishing to overgeneralise what were, in fact, varied positions amongst members of the New Left during the 1950s and 1960s, the tendency amongst them was away from the Adorno/Leavis perspective and more towards a Brechtian/Benjamin one. As the ex-Trotskyite American journalist, Dwight McDonald observed following a 1959 talk at a *Universities and Left Review* forum in London,

The Enemy looks very different from there [U. K.] than from here [U. S.]. From there, it is too little democracy; from here, too much. They see cultural lines as relics of a snobbish past, I see them as dikes against the corruption of Masscult and Midcult. They see standards as inhibiting, I see them as defining. They see tradition as deadening, I see it as nourishing. It may be that as an American I idealise the British situation. But I hope not as much as they idealise ours...But what I was not prepared for was the reaction to my attacks on our mass culture. These were resented in the name of democracy. Hollywood to me was an instance of the exploitation rather than the satisfying of popular tastes. But to some of those who took the floor after my talk, Hollywood was a genuine expression of the masses. They seemed to think it snobbish of me to criticise our movies and television from a serious viewpoint. Since I had been criticising Hollywood for some thirty years, and always with the good conscience one has when one is attacking from the Left, this proletarian defence of our peculiar institution left me rather dazed (McDonald, 1962: 64).

Indeed, unlike many American radicals of that time (see Rosenberg and Manning White, 1957; McDonald, 1962), members of the British Left had begun to discuss in more optimistic terms the potential democratising effects of the mass media, e. g., commercially

produced films, television, radio and advertising (see *New Left Review*, No. 7, 1961; Hoggart, 1962; Hall and Whannel, 1964), though there were those who remained of the opinion that mass culture did not constitute a genuine expression of the 'masses.' As was the case with Williams' Marxist literary criticism, however, many of the Left's arguments in favour of mass culture during this period were often infused with Leavis-like language in their emphasis on "the development of a common culture" and "careful discrimination between what is good, what is bad, and what is potentially good [within television]" (*New Left Review*, No. 7, 1961: 36, 37, 42). So while there was an increasing acceptance of the expansion of what might be considered culture, there was a continued sense of the importance of criticism, for example,

Whether we are considering cool jazz or a classical symphony, Elizabethan drama or a television thriller, the important thing is not to categorise them in the pejorative sense but to determine whether they are good or bad of their kind (*New Left Review*, 1961: 35).

Criticism was thus wedded to an emergent relativism as attempts to distinguish popular culture from mass culture, or these from high culture persisted, and the question of how to determine when something was 'authentic' or 'escapist,' 'good' or 'bad,' 'candy-floss entertainment' or a 'living art form'—whether the subject was television, protest or folk songs, bear-baiting, literature or poetry—remained unresolved (see Shils, 1957; Kristol, 1960; Weightman, 1960; Freeman, 1966; Kelsey, 1966; MacDiarmid, 1966; Reid, 1966).

Despite the continuation of old unresolved paradoxes, however, the appearance of the new cultural critics in the 1950s and 1960s did

introduce new issues into the culture debates and provided important new insights into old issues. One of the most influential occurrences during this period was the inclusion of new members from working and lower middle class origins into the literary elite discussed above. Their very presence within the literary establishment challenged the incommensurability of cultures arguments that had been made in earlier debates for they demonstrated the possibility (or inevitability) of cultural interpenetration through history. Moreover, the fact that many of these writers wrote novels and produced plays about working class culture for non-working class sensibilities suggested a belief and a possibility that, in some cases and to some extent, common access to meanings between cultures could be achieved. And in defiance of an Eliot-like understanding of incommensurability, these critics contributed toward the reconstituting of an educated cultural elite that was not drawn along class lines guaranteed by inheritance or birth.

Another influential contribution to the culture debates from within this group of cultural critics was the rehabilitation of mass culture. The move to defend the cultural products of a 'mass-think society' added a further impetus to the redefinition of the role and status of culture, for it suggested that to view cultures simply as dead or living representations of traditional 'ways of life' was not in step with the changing nature of social/cultural relationships in the technological-age of which Britain was firmly becoming a part.

The influence of the new writers and cultural critics also found its way into the debates over education that dominated the post-war period, where the developments taking place reflected the process of change that British society as a whole was undergoing at the time. In the face of educational restructuring aimed at egalitarian institutional

and curricular reforms, 'New Left' intellectuals looked to the educational system to provide the institutional context for the advancement of a socialist cultural agenda. Many members of the Left continued to support this view despite the fact that the Labour Party had turned increasingly away from advocating an idealised notion of schooling in a socialist society to the acceptance of the inevitability of occupational and social competition within a capitalist one (Lowe, 1988; Simon, 1990). The Labour Party, under pressure to gain significant electoral support, felt compelled to moderate its thinking on educational reform during this period. It sacrificed its more radical commitment to alter existent social class relations through educational restructuring for a policy based more on the old established system of division according to intelligence and aptitude. Thus, while it continued to support comprehensivisation it was, for reasons of political expediency, reluctant to abolish the grammar schools. A contradiction was soon evident between the idea of a popular proletarian culture emerging out of socialist reform in Britain and the reality of a growing mass culture tied to capitalism.

Some amongst the new cultural critics, like Richard Hoggart and Arnold Wesker, attempted to address this contradiction by presenting a view of education, albeit with some circumspection, as a means for members of the working classes to have access to and appreciation of high culture and certain traditional forms of popular culture and oppose the mass or pop culture that threatened to overtake their sensibilities. In *The Uses of Literacy*, for example, Hoggart is both critical of the invasion of the "candy floss world" on traditional working class culture and aware of the conflicts of the "uprooted and anxious" scholarship child. For others, however, particularly those

members of the reconstituted literary establishment who, it was suggested above, had used their education to hop social class fences, the notion that educational expansion would grant more students access to high culture was not a welcome one (viz. Kingsley Amis' famous remark, "more will mean worse").

The diverse sets of beliefs and ideologies expressed by the above critics with respect to class and culture reappeared within the field of education, and in particular, within English teaching, when in the late 1950s and early 1960s, English educators began to reconsider the role of literature and language in their classrooms. Several of the themes that had appeared in the culture debates carried on into these debates, in which, in addition to culture, the themes of tradition, elitism and incommensurability re-emerged as salient. In the event, two sets of paradoxes arose in dialectical relationship to each other: (a) the attempt to introduce democratising strategies within a context of an educational system and a society still based on division; and (b) the struggle to define a role for class culture against a backdrop of changing communities and sensibilities.

Chapter Four

Tradition versus Modernity: English Education and The Fall of Sensibility

Tradition versus Modernity

As the themes of culture, tradition, incommensurability and elitism found their way into debates over English education, a number of complex ideas related to these themes emerged as salient that were inchoately explored by educators and researchers alike. The function and status of the study of literature came into focus due to the emergence within English education of a growing critique of literature and literary criticism and their associations with high culture and elitism. Challenges came from educators themselves who began to view literary criticism as an inherently elitist practice aimed at a preordained and privileged minority. As Burgess and Martin state,

[The] revolt of many English teachers against this elitist view was the beginning of the opposition to the dominance of literary criticism in school literature teaching, and of the Great Tradition as the only source of books to read in the new common schools. Here, with reading levels ranging from illiterate to University entrance, there had to be debate about what texts should and could be read; and arising from this came questions about what should count as literature (Burgess & Martin, 1990: 12-13).

Amongst the issues that educators considered during this period were: what status should be given to mass, pop, popular and working class cultural forms in English studies; what criteria entitled pupils to be included as members of an educated elite; and whether such an elite should be encouraged or maintained.

The particular complex of ideas which will be considered below, and the reconception of the English curriculum to which they contributed, were not, however, a mere product of developments within that particular discipline. They were also a reflection of the especially powerful social focusing that took place with respect to modernity itself during the late 1950s and early 1960s. When the Labour party took office in 1964, it increasingly began to champion the image of a 'techno-scientific' revolution in the context of a modernizing mixed economy. Under the banner of modernity, a planned economy and scientific progress were linked and attention was placed on functions and skills. Ryder and Silver explain the prevailing sentiment at the time:

This was the era of Sputnik, the armaments race, advancing technology and the consumer revolution. No nation could afford to waste its resources. To keep abreast of her neighbours Britain needed both to foster her manpower and to develop her research potential...The argument about educational equality frequently turned into an argument about manpower. The country needed to recruit talent from a much wider base, to change attitudes and expectations, as well as to remove financial and other obstacles in the path to personal and social improvement (Ryder and Silver, 1977: 232).

This concern with efficiency and egalitarianism was shared by members of the Right and the Left in the post-war era. On the right, it set the tone for the emphasis on practical, managerial abilities and on the left, it challenged the popular themes in British socialism of working class traditions, solidarity and community cultures. The socialism of community became increasingly outflanked by the socialism of order and progress. At the same time, social scientists, economists and educators began to participate directly or indirectly with the State's attempt to promote a form of technological

functionalism which related increased economic opportunities and democratisation in British society with modernisation and efficiency. Within education, researchers strategically made links between the government's emphasis on efficiency, the continuing problems of social and educational inequality and institutional change (Bernstein, 1974). As Karabel and Halsey report:

The attack by British sociologists on inequality of educational opportunity was not only that it was unfair, but also that it was inefficient. And the historical context in which arguments about "matching ability and opportunity" were put forward was one of political and ideological struggle over the structure of British education (Karabel and Halsey, 1977: 12).¹

By the late 1950s, the idea that a modernised, technological society would provide a strong material base for the Welfare State and the establishment of a more egalitarian social structure became an important focus of debate in British society.

It was within the context of this social debate, which set tradition against modernity, that the role of literature and of literary criticism came to be challenged. Participants of these debates began to question literary culture's historical role in Britain as the prime bearer of cultural traditions or the Cultural Tradition. Many involved in these debates began to call into question the very idea of literary culture and tradition as the main sources from which to examine and *direct* social

¹ It was during this period that social scientists like Michael Young, Richard Titmuss, David Glass, Jean Floud and others began to conduct studies with regard to such themes as the British worker, kinship networks, social mobility and marriage, education and inter-generational changes in status, neighbourhood and community life and socio-economic background and personality. Against the widely held belief that affluence had been equally distributed throughout society these studies pointed to the failure of the Welfare State to adequately address the continuing problems of inequality and the lack of social justice for the poor and working classes in Britain (Ryder and Silver, 1977).

and cultural life. As literary culture and tradition came to be associated with the established social order and its inherent inequality, the mass culture and scientific culture of the new technological age offered themselves as alternative cultural means to achieve more socially egalitarian ends.

The function of tradition and literary culture was also reinterpreted from within the cultural debates themselves, as Raymond Williams and the New Left reconsidered them from within a Marxist account of social class consciousness. This particular view of cultural traditions highlighted their oppositional function; they were principally interpreted as sites from which to challenge the traditions of the dominant culture. Williams' and Richard Hoggart's accounts were the first to associate tradition with *non-literary* sources for the critical analysis of society, as part of their commitment to ensure that the working classes had the opportunity to bring their own cultural heritage to bear on experience without encountering prejudice. Their alternative accounts served a vital role during this period as sources of opposition to the well-established conservative position which sought to ensure the survival of *the* Cultural Tradition, located in a past which more often than not denied Britain's multi-(class) cultural reality.

By the end of the 1950s, the function and status of literary culture were thus being challenged from *within* by English educators themselves and through an emergent Marxist critique of the function of tradition, and from *without* by the increasing impact of mass culture and scientific culture and their associations with modernity and equality. It was in this context that the themes of culture, tradition, incommensurability and elitism began to be explored in educational

debates. *In the event, the conceptualization of culture began to undergo fundamental changes that would have major implications for its uptake within English education throughout the 1960s and 1970s.*

Culture reconsidered from within: Left and Right response

Common to both the radical and conservative theorisations of cultural traditions of this period was a tendency to assume their *protective* function. Thus the assertion of working class culture served as its protection against (as well as its opposition to) the dominant culture's hegemony, just as to assert the Cultural Tradition was seen as its protection against mass culture or a multi-cultural British Tradition. This almost exclusive emphasis on the protective role of traditions encouraged a view of cultural traditions that, regardless of political position, *overlooked their intellectual, organic function, i. e., as the means by which individuals consciously or impassively maintain and/or transform their beliefs and practices both within their own and with respect to other cultural traditions.* In downplaying the internal transformative abilities of all cultural traditions, dominant and subordinate alike, the issue of cultural change tended to be reduced to a question of political power, the assumption being that both cultural change and stability were *solely* a by-product of class struggle. *As a result, cultures came to be viewed more as ends in themselves than as ever-evolving organic structures.*

This emergent view of cultures as relatively impenetrable, established entities was also evident in the conceptualisation of the relationship between cultural traditions and the issue of incommensurability. Both the radical emphasis on strengthening subordinate cultures and conservative tendency toward reserving

access to high culture, resulted in their joint commitment to the idea of incommensurability. For radicals, any calls for cultural consensus or common standards were viewed as attempting to mask the hegemonic power of the dominant culture. Within this conception, support for egalitarianism went hand in hand with support for cultural relativism as the two came to be perceived as mutually dependent (the tendency to merge the two with respect to culture and language in education is explored in detail in the following chapter). Paradoxically, support for the equal 'right to be heard' began to appear alongside support for the idea that cultures were different enough so as to make communication impossible.

Conservative arguments, on the other hand, sought to protect British society with a Tradition that was not treated as the rightful possession of all members of British society. This exclusionary attitude offered no hope or desire for cultural consensus or common ground—on the contrary, it explicitly refused to consider such an aim. Supporters of this position, moreover, flagrantly posited the continued need for an elite, deliberately conflating an educated elite with the upper classes (see Maude, 1971; Sparrow, 1971), thus supporting the preservation of a stratified social and educational system at a time when Britain was attempting to erode the inherent inequality of its social class system.

When the idea that, in the face of both cultural stability and change, the function of a cultural tradition might entail some concept of an elite became a focus of educational debate, it was this conservative view that received most attention. In the debates over English education, where the issue of an educated elite reappeared, the idea was rejected as supporting the continuation of the hegemony of

the dominant culture. Although it had been the case, for example, as discussed in Chapter Two, that the 1930s' Marxists had seen themselves as something of a vanguard for the proletariat (even as they sought out writers and texts from amongst the working classes to represent their own culture), one of the overarching themes in the discussions over the content of English education in the post-war era became the association of a literature-based curriculum with an elitist approach to the teaching of English. Associating Leavis' call for a 'minority culture' with the most extreme conservative view, both literary criticism and Leavisism were singled out for attack on the grounds that they supported the preservation of high cultural forms and social class hierarchy, though, in contrast to Eliot, there is no evidence that Leavis himself equated an educated elite with membership in a particular social class. The Leavises had stressed the need for a critical minority culture to combat the influences of mass culture and to communicate the meanings of a culture through critical engagement with its signs.²

The above ideas eventually began to have an impact on English teaching where the issues of culture and social class became linked to the development of relevant curriculum content. Educators and

² In the U.S. in the 1960s there was a similar reaction to W. E. B. DuBois' notion of 'the talented tenth' by the Black Power Movement. The idea that only one tenth of the Black population should be educated to occupy positions amongst 'the power elite' was seen as supporting the continuation of prejudice and racial inequality in America (James, 1992: 365-366). The point here is not to equate the *circumstances* that informed DuBois' and Leavis' call for an educated elite. DuBois was speaking as an educated Black man in the segregated south determined to combat racism and claim the right of all Blacks to participate as equals in the social, economic and political reconstruction of post-Civil War America (DuBois, 1989). Leavis, with the same sense of urgency (though arguably based on a less inhumane set of conditions), believed in the need to train an elite to defend civilization against the threat of mass culture. The point of the comparison is merely to suggest similarities in how the original intent of each of their proposals was taken up in different socio-historical contexts.

researchers increasingly turned their attention to the school performances of pupils from different class backgrounds, as studies (e. g., Early Leaving Report, 1954; The Crowther Report, 1959; The Newsom Report, 1963) showed that in spite of structural changes that had improved access for working class pupils within the educational system, they continued to lag behind their middle class counterparts in academic outcome. As it became apparent that macrosociological approaches had failed to adequately account for differential academic achievement, more attention was focused on the social class production and reproduction of knowledge in the classroom (Bernstein, 1958, 1965; Hoare, 1965; Lawton, 1968; Young, 1971).

English educators, in particular, viewed it as their task to strengthen the class/cultural identities of their working class pupils (Shayer, 1972; Mathieson, 1975). For radical educators, following Williams' example, reaffirming the culture of their working class pupils was understood as a means toward the liberation of the working classes as a whole. Many radical educators in the 1960s and 1970s viewed literature and its related activities as reflecting and reproducing exclusively middle class values. For them, the task was thus to strengthen working class identity by, on the one hand, encouraging individual, critical expressivity and creativity (advocating the use of any text that originated from working class pupils themselves—usually in the form of personal narrative, oral or written), and, on the other, through the reading of social realist texts depicting working class life (see Searle, 1973; Rosen, 1974). While these efforts may have served a valuable function, it is nevertheless the case that, just as the Left Book Club had determined what constituted an authentic proletarian novel in the 1930s, it was often educators who decided what was and was not

socially relevant to their working class pupils. Their efforts in this regard were reminiscent of the literary Left of the 1930s who had attempted to both define and then to proclaim the liberatory effects of working class culture for the working classes themselves.

More significantly, however, in presenting working class culture primarily as an end product, in this case, as a weapon with which to protect or liberate itself from middle class culture, radical educators unwittingly found themselves aligned with more conservative pronouncements about strengthening an individual's class identity as a way to reproduce existing class relations and maintain socio-cultural order. Explicit with conservative educators like G. H. Bantock, for example, was the idea that working class pupils were either not culturally able nor was it culturally desirable for them to engage with 'great' literature. Bantock combined a view of culture consistent with that of Eliot (the theme of incommensurability is strongly evident in Bantock's discussions of education) with a belief in the importance of literature and literary criticism for maintaining a "high state of culture" in society. And although he recognized that to conflate the notion of a social class with that of an elite, as Eliot had, was unacceptable in the 1960s, his warning of the "too rapid assimilation of the culturally impoverished who have high I. Q.'s into sections of the community which carry a good deal of social and economic prestige" (Bantock, 1963: 181) came dangerously close to a blurring of distinction between the two. Bantock, and others like him, ironically preferred the same solution advocated by many radical teachers—the development of a curriculum for working class pupils that reflected "the best that has been thought and said within their sphere" (Bantock, 1963: 201). The implicit or explicit acceptance of incommensurability in the

conservative and radical models of culture thus aligned the two agendas, for though they differed in terms of their desired outcome for working class pupils, in both models, culture and class were ascribed an inevitable and invariable unity and integrity.

There were other educators, like David Holbrook, who viewed culture not as the static property of a particular class but as a means toward the liberation of the individual. This position, with its roots in Leavisism and located in an explicit critique of capitalism, advocated the democratisation of culture and critical judgment in the face of the growing influence of mass culture and technological modernity. One popular example of this view was the introduction in classrooms of the traditional cultural forms of the rural and industrial working classes as a means toward strengthening class identity amongst working class pupils. Drawing on a British folklorist tradition, people like A. L. Lloyd and Charles Parker, producer of the Radio Ballads, along with Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, aimed to provide teachers with actual recordings of present-day workers "speaking in the vernacular" as well as folk songs of the past, not to oppose high culture but to counter the influence of pop and mass cultures alienating the working classes from their cultural roots (Parker, 1972: 18). The folklorists' critique of middle class, bourgeois culture, like Leavis', Wesker's or Hoggart's, was based more on its collusion with the mass media to "control the culture of the working class" than for its association with high culture. Within this tradition, and in his own focus on cultural symbols like literature, songs, and rituals in the classroom, David Holbrook emphasized a more Leavis-like literary critical approach. Although generally supportive of the folklorists' interventions, Holbrook was concerned with the lack of discrimination in the folk song movement of Lloyd

and Parker which he claimed "seem[ed] to lapse into a false cult of commonness" and "[led] to the publication, side by side with the great folksongs of a good deal of rubbish by way of working men's songs and the resurrection of a good deal of bawdy stuff of poor quality" (Holbrook, 1961: 107-108; see also Harker, 1980). For Holbrook, although cultural relevance and authenticity were key, the textual source and the quality of such relevance remained paramount.

These Leavis-like interventions were all motivated by a similar concern over the increasing influence of mass culture in British society. In many ways they shared the values of the type of British socialism which, with its emphasis on community and tradition, had been increasingly losing ground since the late 1950s. Critics of the 'mass-think' society, like Wesker, Parker, Holbrook and Leavis himself, shared the radical aim of liberation, but they sought not so much the liberation of the class as the liberation of the individual. According to this view, the liberated individual was empowered through access to traditional culture, high or popular—but never modern, pop or mass culture—to become a new producer of a new cultural order, as Wesker's character Beatie in his play *Roots* exemplified,

"...The whole stinkin' commercial world insults us and we don't care a damn. Well, Ronnie's right—it's our own bloody fault. We want the third-rate—we got it! We got it! We got it! We...D'you hear that? D'you hear it? Did you listen to me? I'm talking. Jenny, Frankie, Mother—I'm not quoting no more....Listen to me someone. God in heaven, Ronnie! It does work, it's happening to me, I can feel it's happened, I'm beginning, on my own two feet—I'm beginning..." (Wesker, 1964: 148).

The "stinkin' commercial world" to which Wesker refers was the world of mass culture which was believed by many in Britain in

the late 1950s and early 1960s as offering, along with scientific culture, an alternative means toward a more egalitarian society than 'traditional' cultures could provide. The liberatory role that Leavis, Parker, Holbrook and Wesker were each in different ways concerned to preserve for popular or high culture came under threat, as the belief became increasingly widespread that the key to a more open and democratic society was to be found outside of art and literature and within the science and technology offered by modernity.

Culture reconsidered from without: Leavis, Snow and 'Two Cultures'

The challenge to literary culture by scientific culture—and the underlying movement in the intellectual field from tradition to modernity of which it was firmly a part—was exemplified by the Leavis-Snow 'Two Cultures' controversy. The 'debate' between Leavis and Snow is well known, although more for Snow's famous 'two cultures' dictum than for the other important and relevant themes which appear in their respective lectures. The debate—and the impassioned responses which it drew from leading intellectuals of the day—caught the spirit of the age. They signalled a country divided over the merits of modernity and uncertain as to the direction in which human society should be headed. On the one hand, there were those with Snow who were apparently willing to grant scientific culture and technology an influential and even dominant place in the country's future, while others, Leavis amongst them, were less optimistic and more critical of this 'cultural' shift.

The views expressed by Snow and Leavis on tradition and modernity struck at an issue which was at the heart of the culture debates as they entered the 1960s and 1970s—the increasing tendency to

regard these as opposing and mutually exclusive ideals. Amongst those who responded publicly to the divergent views of Snow and Leavis, the majority elected to choose sides rather than debate the merits of their respective arguments. Moreover, since during this period it was increasingly common to associate modernity with Britain's future political and economic and even cultural success, the majority of those who responded to the controversy came out uncritically in favour of Snow (see 'Letters' in *The Spectator*. 1962. March 16, 329-333; March 23, 365-367).³ Although Leavis' position was vigourously and intelligently argued, the weight of public opinion and response fell decisively for Snow, for his views, whatever their ultimate merit, succeeded in capturing the spirit of the time.

Snow's lecture combined a plea for the end of existing dichotomies, e. g., between science and literature, pure and applied science, with support for the popular economic and political policies of the day. While Snow's central argument was intended to call attention to the divisions between professions, throughout his lecture he called for a defining and essential role for science and scientists (including engineers, technicians, etc.) in Britain and in the future international community.

To make his case for science, Snow appealed to popular, practical and political arguments. He presented science and technology as essentially value-neutral phenomena capable of ridding the world of poverty and instability—though not competition. Furthermore, in accordance with the then popular economic theory of human capital,

³ The majority of responses to the debate appeared in *The Spectator* because the text of Leavis' Richmond lecture had been reprinted in a previous issue of this journal.

Snow called for the training of more scientists and engineers in higher education. Scientists (and linguists), according to Snow, were the country's best human exports on behalf of the scientific revolution; they were endowed with particular qualities that ensured their value as human, capital investments in foreign (especially third world) countries,

[Scientists] are freer than most people from racial feeling; their own culture is in its human relations a democratic one. In their own internal climate, the breeze of the equality of man hits you in the face, sometimes rather roughly, just as it does in Norway (Snow, 1959: 51).

Snow also stressed the need for superior knowledge and training in science and technology in order to ensure the continued competitiveness and dominance of the West. The West's fear of the imminent communist threat is implicit throughout his lecture and is explicitly addressed in remarks like the following,

For though I don't know how we can do what we need to do, or whether we shall do anything at all, I do know this: that if we don't do it, The Communist countries will in time. They will do it at great cost to themselves and others, but they will do it. If that is how it turns out then we shall have failed, both practically and morally. At best the West will have become an enclave in a different world—and this country will be the enclave of the enclave. Are we resigning ourselves to that? History is merciless to failure. In any case, if that happens, we shall not be writing the history (Snow, 1959: 53).

In the final analysis, Snow's lecture, although clearly not considered so at the time, resembles a classic piece of Cold War political propaganda. Ultimately, his reason for wishing to reunite scientific and literary intellectuals appears to have been to ensure the West greater 'practical and moral' success over control of the scientific

revolution. The scientific and literary 'cultures' to which Snow made reference were to be in the service of Enlightenment ideology and Cold War politics; their function was to respond to and improve material/social conditions and not necessarily to examine them or attempt to understand their potential material/social consequences.

For Leavis, an increased role for science, technology and science education was not a panacea for deteriorating social and cultural conditions. At the heart of Leavis' argument was his long-held belief in the importance of critical standards and practices for determining and affecting the state of culture. He considered Snow a "portent" and a sign of the times. For Leavis, Snow was typical of an increasing majority of the "educated public" who were invested with intellectual authority but incapable of evaluating or transcending the social and cultural conditions in which they lived.

Throughout Leavis' response, he echoed the views of Adorno and other members of the Frankfurt School in expressing his concern for the negative effects of what Adorno had critically referred to as the 'culture industry.' His critique of Snow was in reality an attack on this industry, particularly the mass media, which he believed was responsible for making a cultural authority of Snow through publication of his novels and through the appearance of his essays in the "quality" Sunday papers for which Leavis had contempt. Leavis pointed to the "empty phrases" and "clichés" in Snow's lecture which he declared "emerge spontaneously from the cultural world to which Snow belongs and register uncritically their assumptions, attitudes and ignorances" (Leavis, 1962: 37). According to Leavis, the culture industry was an example of the technological revolution stripped of instinct and intelligence,

For the supersession, in what should be the field of real spiritual and intellectual authority, of serious criteria by the power of creating publicity-values is a frightening manifestation of the way our civilisation is going. It is a concomitant of the technological revolution (Leavis, 1962: 17).

The field of real spiritual and intellectual authority remained for Leavis the field of literature and literary criticism. He reiterated his desire for an "educated public" that would be trained to make value judgements and provide critical interpretation of literary texts concerned with the "salvation" and "felicity" promised by the scientific revolution. According to Leavis, Snow and his supporters embraced technological progress and higher standards of living without 'reading' them critically; and therefore, they were no longer inclined to acknowledge these (in certain manifestations) as insidious social and cultural consequences of the scientific revolution.

While many who came to Snow's defence were very likely motivated by the abrasiveness of Leavis' judgements against Snow's abilities as a novelist and essayist, it is nevertheless true that none of these defenders were critical of the positions taken up by Snow in his lecture. Few of the defences offered on Snow's behalf addressed his, in places, deliberate conflation of science and technology, for example. Moreover, his association of science with technological progress and these with continued Western dominance were taken for granted as unchallengeable assertions.

The language of modernity to which Snow appealed—its value-neutrality, its guarantees of higher standards of living for all and its promise to serve as a deterrent to nuclear war—convinced many in the waning years of the 1950s that to challenge progress was to *revert* to a belief in 'traditional culture.' And as one of Leavis' critics wished to

claim, there was evidence that such cultures had already begun to be hopelessly buried in the past,

...If you, like the Bushmen, spend your life desperately trying to stay alive and are in fact dying out, however poignantly, because your marvelous skills are inadequate, then you are less alive and, horrible as it is, less human, progressively as social hope diminishes... ('Letters,' 1962: 363).

In this social and political climate, Leavis' call for a critical language with which to interpret the consequences of the scientific revolution on the state of culture was readily dismissed as encouraging social and cultural pessimism (i.e., a lack of "social hope" for the future), conservatism and, ultimately, wilful inertia.

What is most significant in the Leavis-Snow controversy to the argument being developed in this thesis, however, is not the 'two cultures' assertion, but the very different conceptualisations of culture and tradition that informed their positions and the distinct models of culture that emerged from these. On the one hand, Leavis presented a view of cultures as embedded in traditions, based in convention and community. This is a view of culture where the relationship between individual and community is viewed as organic, i. e., as constituting and constituted. The relationship between the individual and the culture is considered to be one of reciprocity and reflexivity—and culture is perceived as both a dynamic and a unifying entity. This understanding of culture assumes a deep-rooted relationship between meaning and form. Indeed, not only is it an assertion of their inseparability, in Leavis, it represented an underlying belief in the *authority of form*. In Leavis' world, a fault of style was a fault of being (this is what allows him to relate the quality of writing in Snow's

novels with an attack on his person). For this reason, aesthetic response, the recognition of the relationship between style and being, became of paramount importance.

In Snow's representation of culture in the language of modernity, on the other hand, the authority of form has been completely rejected. With scientific culture, form has become a necessary but completely arbitrary representation of an objective world. This separation of meaning and form signifies a move away from concepts of organic relationships and stabilities at the level of the text as well as the individual and culture. Snow's emphasis is on the trans-historical and the trans-national appeal of modernity, not the local solidarity of traditions. In the international culture of science, objectivity and rationality are presumed to offer freedom *in opposition to* cultural traditions which are perceived as binding. Snow's claim that scientists are "freer than most from racial feeling" is an assertion of the possibility of communicating from outside of a cultural tradition; it suggests a world in which the equality of humankind is achieved through objective knowledge and reason, not critical judgement or interpretation (thus linguists are also free according to Snow, presumably because they have 'objective' knowledge of language). With this Enlightenment model of scientific culture, the idea of culture as object or end product is re-enforced. Culture, like form, becomes something 'out there' in relationship to meaning. It is the surface reflection of an objective world, rather than a means of interpreting within and between distinctive worlds.

Each of these views, and variations of them, appeared and were rearticulated in the debates over the relationship between culture, language and literature that took place in the 1960s and 1970s in

English education. The extent to which these conflicting views contributed to the major paradigm shift from literature to language in English teaching during this same period is the focus of the next chapter. Their specific influence over developments regarding the status of literature and literary criticism and the 'death of sensibility' within the English curriculum will be described below.

English Education

The Death of Sensibility and the Culture of the Child

It has been argued above that the omission of a concept of cultures as transforming, organic structures became a feature of English education as a result of developments both from within that discipline and from the wider social movement in British society toward a belief in the liberatory capacities of modernity. Within English teaching, radical and conservative educators worked with an understanding of cultures as relatively impermeable entities in order to protect working class pupils/culture from the hegemony of bourgeois culture or to preserve bourgeois culture for the middle classes only. From outside the discipline, the emergent discourse of modernity presented a view of the individual as detached from culture to ensure the freedom of the individual from the bonds of traditional knowledge. These two images—culture as protective totalities and the individual set free from culture—eventually became linked and, in combination, greatly influenced developments within English education—specifically, the rejection of literary criticism and aesthetics in favor of a pedagogic model which stressed 'lived experience,' privileging individual/collective subjectivities and pupils' own textual productions, as well as the use of social realist and non-literary texts.

With regard to the activity of literary criticism, the shift to pupil-centered, progressive pedagogy gave precedence to the creative *individual* as opposed to the text. As Shayer noted, "rather than testing the pupil against the text, the text [was] tested for its suitability, relevance, entertainment capacity, against the pupil and [would] be rejected if it fail[ed] to fulfil the functions required of it" (Shayer, 1972: 171-172). Under these terms, any text, literary or non-literary, would be decided on primarily for its thematic content; it functioned more as a tool to engage adolescents in discussions of socially, politically or psychologically relevant issues—though as Abbs points out, the term 'relevant' was never very carefully excavated (Abbs, 1989: 48). The relevance of mass culture, for example, tended to be embraced rather than interrogated by educators, as the impact of the media and of pop culture on their pupils became as socially real as any 'authentic' (working) class/cultural influences. Film, for example, it has been argued, was often used simply to illuminate the narrative of a literary text as part of an English class,

The assumption here seems to be that works of art are transparent; that in them one meets characters just as one meets them in real life and without any need for techniques of criticism to understand them...What I would like to question fundamentally is the notion that it is somehow easier, "less academic" for the CSE level student to study literary or cinematic texts in this way, starting as it were beyond the artefact, with a given meaning whose sources are never illuminated (Bazalgette, 1974: 11-13).

Likewise, responses to literary texts were usually limited to recall of plot summaries elicited, as Abbs recalls, through questions like, "What is the story about?," or extended to draw on pupils' own 'extra-textual' experiences, "What do you think about that view?" and "When did

you last...argue with your parents?" (Abbs, 1989: 58). This priority of content over form suggested that, just as the individual and the culture could be understood separately, so could the sources of meaning of texts be found outside of the texts themselves.

A focus on texts as complex organizations of meaning and form was not encouraged or emphasized—and traditional literary criticism, rather than being perceived as having the potential to serve a more political and 'relevant' function, was rejected as a possible method for mining the 'politics of experience' of working class pupils. The analysis of texts, as established through traditional literary criticism, was seen to position pupils as mere receivers of cultural artefacts and thus was thought negatively to position them and their culture in a primarily passive role. The notion that a literary work's meaning was intrinsically related to its structural form disappeared, and with it the belief in the value of developing pupils' aesthetic responses to a piece of literature or a work of art. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has argued against a similar historical tendency in African-American criticism to separate meaning from form. As he notes,

Form was merely a surface for a reflection of the world, the world here being an attitude toward race; form was a repository for the disposal of ideas; message was not only meaning but value; poetic discourse was taken to be literal, or once removed; language lost its capacity to be metaphorical in the eyes of the critic; the poem approached the essay, with referents immediately perceivable; literalness precluded the view of life as allegorical; and black critics forgot that writers approached things through words, not the other way around. The functional and didactic aspects of formal discourse assumed primacy in normative analysis. The confusion of realms was complete: the critic became social reformer, and literature became an instrument for the social and ethical betterment of the black person (Gates, 1987: 30).

Gates traces this tendency in part to the borrowing by black critics of a Marxist base-superstructure—transformed into a race-superstructure—model of cultural production. Rather than see only potential for black 'liberation' in this model, however, Gates considers the repressive elements involved in rendering black art essentially referential. Amongst other things, he suggests, it tends to devalue the diversity of 'the black experience' and denies black literature its status as a verbal art capable of sustaining sophisticated verbal analysis. Standing Gates' argument somewhat on its head, it is possible to relate his remarks to the tendency in English teaching to reconstitute an essentialized view of working class culture through social realist texts and, at the same time, to claim the irrelevance of literary criticism and aesthetic judgements to any of the texts with which pupils engaged. Given the existence of such tendencies, English educators appear to have fallen into similar traps as some black critics in attempting to make visible and make better the culture of their working class pupils. For while English educators attempted to enunciate a socio-political function for literature and challenge traditional relationships between production/reception, reader/text and high/popular culture, *they produced no accompanying alternative means for getting from the relevance/political function of literature to the analysis of specific texts.* Popular or social realist texts were valued as enabling their readers to penetrate the economic and social conditions in which they were created without any evidence for what, in the reader-text or text-society relationship, might allow this to be so. The hypothetical reader, however much reconstituted as an active consumer, remained unarmed with the tools of critical textual analysis.

The prevailing understanding of cultures as primarily protective entities which individuals related to from a position of relative autonomy meant that within English education, culture came to refer to the individual or collective life experiences/identities of each pupil, socially positioning them with respect to social class as individuals, yet *without an account of an immediate interpretive community*. Within this construct, the individual child became a creative individual cut loose from the constraints of community. The tendency within the child-centered, progressive pedagogies that emerged in literature teaching to associate creativity and expressivity solely with individual production created a theoretical gap, as it were, between the culture and the child. In the process, creativity and sensibility—like the problem of "tradition and the individual talent"—became treated as separate and unrelated, foregoing Eliot's reminder that,

No poet or artist has his complete meaning alone...The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living (Eliot, 1960: 4, 11).

The individualising process that took place within English teaching, motivated, on the one hand, by the desire to empower the working classes, and on the other, by the promise of social progress offered by modernity, made form (the community, the culture) no longer necessary for meaning, and challenged the very idea of form as a signature of content. The theoretical separation of meaning and form that occurred in English teaching contributed to the dismissal of many of the aims and methods of literary criticism, particularly its aesthetic

dimension. The idea of sensibility as the formation of an aesthetic of being—through a text and in a context—with others within a culture was lost. The relationship between individual creativity, in which the pupil would participate in the active creation of a text through evaluative conversation, and the formation of a collective sensibility became obscured, as the tendency to contrast the active producer with the passive receiver established a false dichotomy between the two.

Ultimately, the question of developing a 'politics' of experience or lived culture for the purpose of raising critical recognition came to be treated in English education as separate and unrelated to a training in an 'aesthetics' of experience or sensibility. The idea of forming a contemporary sensibility was not viewed as compatible with the struggles over hegemony and individual freedom on which English educators and British society were focused. Sensibility, without an explicit politics to speak through, became associated with high culture—the established, the refined and the 'dead'—rather than the popular, the changeable or the 'lived.'

In the end, the forging of a relationship between the political and the aesthetic that would work in practice proved difficult to accomplish, and attempts to engage the dialectics of dichotomies such as reception and production, meaning and form, or active and passive consumption remained unresolved. Important questions that had been raised by English educators themselves, e. g., what should count as literature; what critical or analytical method(s) should be put to a text; and what, in any case, should count as a text, were set aside rather than studiously debated and many of the assumptions that informed their practices, particularly with regard to the relationships between reader and text and class and culture were left unexamined.

James Britton: personal growth through literature

James Britton's approach to literature deserves special consideration for while it formed part of the 'personal growth' model discussed above, Britton shared Leavis' commitment to claiming a particular role for literature in the formation of individual sensibilities. Where they differed, however, is where the individual empowerment model, in general, departed from the literary critical one, i. e., in the priority given to the individual over the text.⁴

Britton adopted the idea of literary texts as 'structures of feeling' from Suzanne Langer's philosophical inquiries into the idea of language, including literary language, as a symbolizer of the inner structures of thought and emotions that were formed through the individual's experience of the world (Langer, 1957). For Britton, literature was one means by which pupils could engage their inner structures of feelings through linguistic expression. In order to elaborate this image, Britton borrowed from D. W. Harding the idea of literature as written language in the 'spectator' role. Harding had developed the notion of the spectator in order to replace the existing model of the reader-text relationship as one of vicarious wish-fulfillment or 'identification' with the characters or events in the text. He wished to claim instead the idea of reading as a social act, as

⁴ Frances Christie, in a recent article, fails to note this important difference when she claims a "significant relationship" between Britton and the personal growth model and the Leavisite tradition (Christie, 1993: 95). Christie is also mistaken in suggesting that Britton and Leavis "were not primarily interested in language" (98). Britton's developmental model was informed by a profound interest in the role of language in learning (his model is discussed in detail in the chapter which follows) and Leavis' literary criticism presupposes engagement with the language poets and novelists (and critics) use in order to create (or derive) meaning in a literary text.

"affirming with the author a set of values" (Harding, 1962: 147), as he suggested,

The more sophisticated reader knows that he is in social communication of a special sort with the author, and he bears in mind that the represented participants are only part of a convention by which the author discusses and proposes an evaluation of possible human experiences (Harding, 1962: 147).

Britton used the notion of spectator in his own model to suggest that through the process of detachment from their own or some fictionalized account of experience, pupils developed emotional and cognitive skills—that the act of reading or writing in the spectator role encouraged pupils to abstract and reflect upon the world and develop the ability to make value judgements in the face of their and other's experiences.

However, with Britton, the notion of 'spectator,' taken up within a framework of child-centred pedagogy, ultimately championed the poet over the poem, rather than exploring the relationship between them. Pupils' own writings and experiences were foregrounded and the spectator role was interpreted primarily as one which pupils took up to contribute to their own individual growth rather than as a means for understanding a text as an order of socially organized meanings and form. In Britton and the personal growth model, the notion of 'spectator' thus never took on the force or influence that it might have as a literary critical tool or guide for the reading or evaluating of texts.

Literature, Criticism and the Incommensurability of Cultures

Further challenges were made against literary criticism and Leavis' claim that his critical determinations regarding a literary text were derived from an 'overt' and 'collaborative,' "this is so, isn't it?"—"yes, but," interplay of judgments. His critics underscored the implicit value system of traditional literary culture operating within such 'open' exchanges and suggested that in the absence of a consensus of values amongst participants, Leavis and his literary critical method collapsed. As Perry Anderson wrote,

The central idea of this epistemology—the interrogative statement—demands one crucial precondition; a shared stable system of beliefs and values. Without this, no loyal exchange and report is possible. If the basic formulation and outlook of readers diverges, their experiences will be incommensurable. Leavis's whole method presupposes, in fact, a morally and culturally unified audience. In its absence, his epistemology disintegrates (Anderson, 1968: 50).

Educators in the 1960s and 1970s were not, of course, faced with a "morally and culturally unified" group of pupils. More significantly, however, conservative and radical educators alike accepted and advocated a notion of incommensurability which, on the one hand, constructed culture as the fixed property of a particular social class, and on the other, conflated the terms 'incommensurable' and 'incommunicable'. These educators, like Anderson, legitimately perceived incommensurability to be about social (or human) division and separation—the idea that there are, in Winch's words, 'limiting notions' (Winch, 1977: 183) which may preclude the possibility of cross-cultural human dialogue.

It must be considered, however, that within actively productive, 'organic' tribal societies, criticism, in the sense of dialogues of judgement, is virtually non-existent or limited because so much is common and shared (see Goody, 1977). Criticism then (of literature, art, music, etc.), would, against Anderson's claims, presuppose the *non-organic, non-already* agreed judgements within the social group. Under these conditions, criticism thus becomes an instrument for regaining, for the modern world, the no-longer-shared or stable dialogue of the organic community (as was Leavis' intent); it is the activity of acting *as though* there is a common basis for agreement or rational comparison, based on the belief in the existence of a rational order, in say, principles of relevance, or in some aspects of experience or degree of shared humanity. As a contributor to *Essays in Criticism* wrote:

Criticism...is an attempt to reach agreement on the nature of a given, particular work; to question whether such agreement is possible is merely to take away the sense, not only of criticism but of literature. The "rules" of criticism are the rules of conversation: certain standards of intelligence and relevance are implicit in the undertaking, as well as a reasonable minimum of common experience. In the absence of these conditions, criticism, like conversation, is impossible (Dawson, 1964: 7).

For educators in the 1960s and 1970s, however, in the face of the prevailing argument that literary criticism required cultural consensus, and in a socio-political climate in which consensus was either deemed impossible or undesirable or both, two positions emerged in principle and in practice—*literary criticism was either retained as an 'elitist' practice or rejected as one*. The idea that criticism might serve toward the creation of a new, dynamic, and pluralist cultural exchange was not

considered, since the necessary conditions for the function of criticism and the formation of a 'contemporary' sensibility were not perceived to exist. In a climate in which the focus was on relativism, and not 'rationalist' conversation (in the hermeneutic sense), the notion of incommensurability was used to oppose the idea of criticism as discussion, i. e. argument and reason, that could absorb social class, ethnic or gendered positions (these points will be taken up and elaborated in Chapters Six and Seven). In the end, by demoting literature and attacking Leavis, the possibility of a dialogic, conversational literary criticism, less organized around a cultural canon and more around analytical conversation (leading to agreement or disagreement), was rejected.

But while the changing function of criticism can be associated with certain post-war socio-political realities, Leavis himself (and some of his associates) also bore the responsibility. What had begun as an *oppositional* practice in training in discrimination and evaluation—i.e., "a training for a greater awareness, for a sharper attention to subtle meanings" (Hall and Whannel, 1964: 37)—increasingly degenerated into a habit of making particularly autonomous decisions about what should and should not be allowed in the Great Tradition (Bateson, 1964; Said, 1985). As a result, one of Leavis' key concerns—the formation of a contemporary sensibility—became associated with an imposed, pre-cultivated literary 'taste' rather than a collective, literary activity in perception and judgment.⁵

⁵ Said suggests that French and American New Criticism suffered a similar transformation as did Leavisism over time. He underscores the original populist intention behind each of these schools of criticism in their desire to create and expand a community of responsive readers in order to compete for authority within mass culture. However, Said contends that with their uptake in the academy, "...an interest in expanding the constituency lost out to a wish for abstract correctness and

While the specifically non-democratic aspects of literary criticism and the teaching of literature were effectively replaced with more egalitarian-oriented 'personal growth' and 'social realist' models in English education, neither of these approaches addressed the question of the potential function of a training in literary criticism and aesthetic response within a more democratised educational system. The positions taken up by participants in the English educational debates with regard to culture and tradition actually militated against this as a possibility, for both representatives of the Left and the Right denied the transformative capacities of cultural traditions, relying on essentialist notions of class and culture to defend their positions. Paradoxically, their shared conceptualisation of culture actually served to protect traditional class/cultural boundaries which, in turn, lent support to the apparent undeniability of the incommensurability of cultures.

There was, however, a discernible tension in the argument for incommensurability which partially originated from within the

methodological rigor within a quasi-monastic order" (Said, 1985: 140). He attributes this to the tendency in modern universities toward the separation of disciplines and the conditions this creates for the emergence of specialized forms of communication and of knowledge. An interesting earlier critique of the academy's influence over the function of criticism appears in Richard Ohmann's 1970 essay, *Teaching and Studying Literature at the End of Ideology*. Though Ohmann shares Said's concern with the relationship between the diminishing democratic function of criticism and its achieved prestige within the academy, he discusses this relationship in terms of the changing meaning of the notion of pluralism on which he believes (positively) American New Criticism was established in the 1950s. For Ohmann and others studying and teaching literature during the 1960s, the measures taken by the universities against the student protest movement revealed the academy as a hostile environment for political action and social change. Their original belief—that through literature (and New Criticism) literary critics could serve a liberatory, humanist role in society—was rejected for, on the one hand, buying into the notion of academic freedom and on the other sustaining (by refusing to name) the ideology of bourgeois individualism that informed their practice (Ohmann, 1970). For a current debate on these issues see the collection of essays in *The New Historicism*, 1989, ed. H. Aram Veenser.

socially egalitarian promises of modernity itself. On the one hand, the creative individual was presented as free or potentially free from the constraints of the interpretive community. This freedom vis a vis modernity was, moreover, offered as an antidote to the limiting boundaries of traditional societies. On the other hand, however, individuals and individual cultures were portrayed as so bound to particular sets of traditional values and beliefs as to make communication with others impossible or undesirable or both. This emergent contradiction between the belief in individual freedom and the acknowledgement of cultural constraints became a lasting and central feature of the debates in English education throughout the 1970s. While the tension between these apparently contradictory aims was played out on the intellectual field of English education during this period as part of contemporary educational debates about the relationship between social class, language and culture, the origins of the controversy lie in the debates between tradition and modernity that had begun to take place several decades earlier.

Chapter Five

The Paradigm Shift in English Education: The Language Debates and the Fate of Culture

Shifts in the nature of literature in the classroom were an important factor behind the frequently observed 'paradigm shift' in English teaching which made language and linguistics the focus of teachers' and researchers' attention by the 1960s and 1970s (see Inglis, 1971; Shayer, 1972; Mathieson, 1975; Abbs, 1980; Allen, 1980; Ball, 1982; Catt, 1988; Burgess and Martin, 1990). The shift toward language was a significant part of the trend towards the child-centred, anti-elitist and progressive 'politics' of English teaching discussed in Chapter Four. The literature cited above variously suggests that the shift toward language either bypassed, rejected or resolved the complex issues of class and culture that had been raised in the culture debates with respect to literature. Amongst these authors, it is generally agreed that, like the 'politics of experience' agenda encountered in the personal growth and social realist approaches to literature, the language paradigm in English teaching was similarly organised around a shift away from the 'bearers of culture,' (teachers and texts), towards the 'producers of culture,' (pupils, their talk and their writing).

By stressing variety of language uses and relevant language situations as well as speech and linguistic variation, the renewed focus on language promised to help rid English teaching of the problems associated with literature and literary criticism, e. g., the dominance of textual analysis, the 'subjective' nature and 'inherent elitism' of the

consideration and responses given to literary works, and the perceived lack of relevance of literary critical language and 'high' culture to the lives of working class pupils. Instead, relevance and personal creativity were stressed and 'culture' came to either refer simply to the individual pupil (the 'culture' of the child) or to the immediate environments which pupils inhabited (the 'culture' of the school, the community, etc.).

Rather than dissolving the culture debates within English education, however, many of the issues regarding literature that were dismissed by educators, including, the relationship between meaning and form, actually re-emerged in the language paradigm. The working concepts of culture and tradition that had influenced the shift toward language study and away from traditional literary criticism in English teaching reappeared to inform the debates over language, culture, and class that emerged during this period. The very issues that educators had hoped to escape in their rejection of Leavisism resurfaced in these debates, but this time the text under scrutiny was language itself.

'Equality of Outcome' and the Intelligence Debate

One of the principal motives for the change in focus on language and communication during this period had been the question, touched on in previous chapters, of equality of outcome in education for pupils from divergent socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The acquisition of a greater knowledge about language by pupils and teachers alike was associated with, and even intrinsically linked to, the issue of outcome and the achievement of greater social and educational equality, with a particular emphasis on working class pupils. This concern over language and equality of outcome, moreover, merged

with another debate already taking place in Britain regarding the relationship between social class and intelligence or cognitive ability.

The 'intelligence' debate in Britain centred around the question of whether intelligence was innate and inherited or whether it was principally determined by and/or affected by the environment. The principal figure representing the former view was the psychologist Sir Cyril Burt who conducted numerous, well-publicised empirical studies which he offered as evidence for the belief that heredity and not environment was the major factor that determined varying levels of intelligence within and between different social classes. Although Burt admitted the environment as a minor factor in shaping or constraining cognitive development, the general findings of his research were that the major component of intelligence (which he defined as an innate, general, cognitive mental capacity) was connected to an individual's genetic constitution, that this was biologically inheritable, and that it was the differential distribution of genotypes that accounted for lower performances on general intelligence tests amongst the working class population (Burt, 1937, 1943, 1955).¹

An alternative line of investigation emerged in the 1950s which challenged Burt's and others' privileging of heredity over environment as the explanation for pupils' educational success or

¹ Although this research has since been discredited (see Kamin, 1974; and see Eysenck and Kamin, 1981), it remains relevant to the present discussion beyond its historical significance insofar as in establishing the idea of a genetically-derived 'innate,' universal, general intelligence, it contributed to the confusion that would later appear in the deficit—difference debate between a genetically-derived and a socially-derived cognitive inheritance. Bernstein's identification of different *cognitive* capacities between working class and middle class pupils, for example, was conflated by many with the geneticists' claim for different *innate* capacities. The result was that the meaning of the terms in the context of academic and educational debates over competence became practically indistinguishable. The issue of these debates will be taken up in more detail further on in this chapter.

failure. More sociological in orientation, it arose out of research in the area of post-war social mobility (see Glass, 1954) and was interested in the role of education in affecting more 'subtle' forms of social selection following its restructuring (see Himmelweit, 1954; Floud, 1956). This research called attention to social factors contributing to educational inequality such as family size and home conditions as well as psychological issues, for example, the kinds of motivation and aspirations that working class pupils and their families had with respect to their education, or that teachers encouraged in their working class pupils. Although the research did not go so far as to claim that the material and 'cultural' features of the home environment should be regarded as social determinants of intelligence (Floud, 1956: 143-144; Halsey, 1958), in underlining the importance of environmental and behavioural factors, research of this kind began to successfully challenge the widely held view that innate ability was the sole relevant factor in educational outcome.

It was from within this same tradition that the work of Basil Bernstein emerged in the 1950s. His work went even further, however, both in challenging Burt's assumptions about cognition and in relating the features of the home environment to educational attainment (see Bernstein, 1958, 1961). Bernstein suggested that the distinctive, socially-derived modes of cognitive functions, e. g., perception and reasoning, that obtained between social classes developed through and were sustained by the medium of language,

It is proposed that forms of spoken language in the process of their learning, elicit, reinforce, and generalise distinct types of relationships with the environment and thus create particular dimensions of significance. Speech marks out what is relevant—affectively, cognitively and socially—and

experience is transformed by that which is made relevant
(Bernstein, 1961: 288-289).

Bernstein's focus on language offered a more penetrating interpretation than previous sociological studies for the relationship of the environment to measurements of intelligence. According to his theory, unequal outcomes on I. Q. tests of verbal ability between social classes, for example, could not be explained solely through some general innate factor, nor seen simply as outcomes of problems of assimilation or attitude. They were, instead, a consequence of the distinctive forms of language which pupils acquired through socialisation within a particular family and/or class background. Bernstein thus foregrounded language as the key to environmental influences on cognitive performance. It was, he claimed, the principal means by which individual and social attitudes and behaviours were formed and made manifest.

These early formulations of Bernstein's theory served two important functions. They contributed to the aim of work in the sociology of education to highlight how social factors intruded on educational processes and they provided sociological, linguistic and psychological insights into the function of language in the learning process. Their relationship to the language paradigm and Bernstein's relationship to the politics of the intellectual field of English education is explored more fully below.

The Intellectual Field of English Education

The language paradigm was informed in the field of education by several related areas of theoretical interest. At the centre of English teaching during this time was an interest in the role of language in

cognitive and emotional development, due in large part to the influences of James Britton and Harold Rosen both of whom were at the University of London, Institute of Education, which provided an important institutional site for the dissemination of new ideas to the teaching profession (Britton, 1967, 1970, 1970a; Barnes, Britton and Rosen, 1969). Bernstein's investigations into language and social class were also well known through the development of his sociolinguistic code theory at the Sociological Research Unit located at the Institute and the related empirical research that began to emerge during this period (see Lawton, 1968; and see Bernstein, 1972). Michael Halliday's Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching also contributed to the intellectual field although this work did not have the same influence in English education as did Britton's or Rosen's during this period.

Meanwhile, also developing during this period of emergent focus on language in British education was the new, inter-disciplinary field of sociolinguistics, as work in the area of language and culture came to be known. In Britain, sociolinguistics came to the aid of the language paradigm through its contribution to several important inter-related themes, some of which had already been present in the culture debates with regard to literary culture. These included: the notion of incommensurability, but with a shift in emphasis from culture to language; the relationship between language, culture and thought; and the question of the viability and or desirability of 'cross-cultural,' cross-lingual' communication.

While each of the above elements in theoretical development must be viewed as independent of one another—and, indeed, they occupied or were granted quite distinct positions—together they generated a major part of the intellectual field of English education in

the 1960s and 1970s. The ideas which they elaborated determined, in large part, the shape of the 'language debates' which supplanted the culture debates as the site of contestation where matters of language and culture were concerned and, taken as a whole, they contain the conceptual *and* the political framework on which the language paradigm was constructed.

Many of the ideas about language which gained in currency during this time in English education actually drew on some of the same intellectual sources, for example, from cognitive psychology and linguistic or anthropological traditions. But the differences between the various elaborations of these—particularly in their regard for the impact of 'culture' on linguistic processes—were highly significant with respect to deeper and more enduring intellectual issues.

The Language Debates — "Who can tell the dancer from the dance?"

The Fateful Split between Competence and Performance

Amongst the participants to the language debates, Britton and Bernstein both credit Langer and Cassirer, Sapir and Vygotsky with being important influences on the formation of their ideas (Britton, 1970; Bernstein, 1971). Both Britton and Bernstein viewed language as a form of symbolic behaviour; as the medium by which ideas and beliefs as well as images and sensory data were transformed into verbal concepts. As Langer expressed it, "Language is conception and conception is the frame of perception" (Langer, 1957: 126). Also evident in their writings is Sapir's notion of the heuristic function of language, the capacity of language to interpenetrate with experience. Language, suggested Sapir, not only represented experience, it also discovered and interpreted meanings for its speakers that they had not derived from

first hand experiences (Sapir, 1949: 1-44). But although both Britton and Bernstein may have shared the view of language as both a symboliser and moderator of experience, their interpretations of the significance of this view with regard to education differed considerably.

Britton emphasised the creative and interpretative function of language in his work, seeing it as fundamental to pupils' cognitive and emotional development. He endorsed the idea, for example, that through talk and personal writing, pupils developed their natural capacities to extrapolate from personal experiences and construct patterned, mental models of the larger environment in which they lived and which were necessary for abstract, higher order thinking (Britton, 1970). Britton and the followers of the 'personal growth' model focused almost exclusively on the cognitive and affective modes of representation which projected onto experience and were transformed into (and by) language. Their concern was to develop the innate potential that all children shared for making sense or meaning out of their environments. The emphasis was on the creativity and imagination that individuals demonstrated in constructing, categorising and classifying their way towards an experienced world view.

Although Britton acknowledged a social and cultural dimension to modes of representation, his developmental model effectively detached the social from the affective and cognitive domains. The social became, in essence, the 'world' or the 'environment' within which experiences happened; it was presented as autonomous and real, as something 'out there' within which experiences occurred. This positioning of the social as active yet apart in Britton involved a choice on his part to remain focused on what for him was most meaningful

and relevant—the relationship between ‘structures of feelings’ and symbolic forms. However, it can also be traced to the ‘cognitive revolution’ in psychology in the 1950s when interest shifted from behaviourist-inspired observations of overt responses to environmental stimuli to cognitive-oriented explorations of the unobservable mental processes that guided actions. One important result in education of this new interest in the workings of the mind was the influence of Chomskian linguistics which introduced a theoretical split between ‘competence’—what an individual knew ‘inside’—and ‘performance’—what an individual did ‘outside’ (Chomsky, 1965: 3-4; Bruner, 1986). One of the implications of this was that, in terms of a child’s cognitive development, it was permissible, even desirable, to view the mind independently of the social world—hence, while culture happened outside of the child’s mind, cognitive and emotional development occurred inside.

But what had been introduced as a theoretical split within linguistics between competence and performance was introduced within the intellectual field of English education to universalise, and in effect, de-socialise, innate (linguistic/cognitive) competencies. Competence was championed over performance as proof of all children’s universal—understood as *equal*—potential for developing essential competencies. Competence became viewed not as genetically- or socially-, but mentally-governed by an internal logic of the mind; and the development of various competencies was understood to occur naturally across stages of growth through similar mental operations and with similar results for all children.²

² The social was only reinstated in order to account for observable differences in individual performances, but the reasons given for socially-constituted differences

Against the geneticist account of innateness, Britton supported the view that all children could and did acquire the *same* capacity to represent both particular and universal aspects of experience because all were innately endowed with this capacity. From this, however, Britton and the personal growth model also assumed that *meanings* were the same for all children because of this shared capacity and because the 'world' in which meanings were generated was the same. In removing 'competence' from any social or cultural sources (and thus rescuing it from the geneticist account that paradoxically needed the social world to sustain its position), Britton and the personal growth model were left with the 'world' as the unifying source for the patterning of meanings and their linguistic (or non-linguistic) representations. In this account, however, although the mind was released from geneticist interpretations of innateness, there was no mechanism for differentiating between the mind's *capacity* for meaning-making and the *actual meanings* which were produced.

Bernstein's work did raise the questions which Chomsky and developmental cognitive psychology left to one side. Bernstein attempted to demonstrate how the mind interacted with the social and cultural to generate both different orderings of meanings and different forms of language. For Bernstein, however much creativity and imagination entered into this process, it nevertheless was both generative of and generated by the social in all its forms, including language.

were always *external* not internal to the individual child. Explanations were initially sought from research in the sociology of education, for its insights into the material and cultural conditions that contributed to unequal attainment amongst pupils. Later, the 'new sociology of education' emerged and the problem was seen more in ideological terms, as originating in social institutions (see Young, 1971).

For Bernstein, the importance of Sapir's heuristic view of language was not primarily, as it was for Britton, its suggestion that language had the power to discover meanings for its speakers. What was important for Bernstein was that Sapir revealed language as a *shaper*, for better or for worse, of our experiences in and of possible worlds. Sapir himself would not have agreed with Britton's posing of an objective 'world' within which the merger of experience and language occurred, freely and naturally, through the mind. The connection between language and culture was made by both Sapir and Bernstein in terms of *constraint*; the possibilities of language's discoveries were necessarily limited by the culture and vice versa. Sapir, for example, makes the following point in his account of the heuristic function of language which Britton omits,

Language is at one and the same time helping and retarding us in our exploration of experience, and the details of these processes of help and hindrance are deposited in the subtler meanings of different cultures (Sapir, 1949: 8).

Bernstein, moving beyond Sapir, argued that linguistic and cognitive development was subject to the influences of power and discursive regulation found within distinctive cultures, social groups and social structures. Bernstein, unlike Chomsky, sought to locate competence (reattached to performance) within the restraints of power relations and their resulting differential unequal positionings. Bernstein insisted on the idea of competence as simultaneously cognitively inscribed *and* socially constituted. This problematised the popular view that all children were 'equally,' because innately, competent by making competence a *social* not a mere cognitive aspect of the mind. The fact that the perception of the environment was

patterned along sociological and cultural lines meant that the acquisition of different orders of meaning was not necessarily equivalent or equal. Different perceptions and interpretations which pupils held of their worlds as well as the forms of language which these generated could be limiting or innovating, constraining or creative, depending on the social circumstances surrounding their production and/or reception.

Britton's Vygotsky /Bernstein's Vygotsky

The attention given to Vygotsky by Britton and Bernstein was a natural extension of their interest in the ideas of Langer and Sapir discussed above, although their take up of Vygotsky was distinctive. Vygotsky, like Sapir, emphasised the interpenetration of language and the environment, but went further by actually describing how classifications of experiences were brought about in and by language. For Britton, Vygotsky contributed first a psychological and later a social dimension to his interest in the relationship between language, the environment and the development of thinking in children (Britton, 1970, 1987). Vygotsky presented language as a regulatory device that assisted children in sorting and ordering their experiences of the world, enabling them to develop new forms of thought and more complex forms of behaviour. For Britton, Vygotsky's suggestion that a child's monologic use of language, 'speech for oneself,' served as a form of self-orientation with respect to the environment, assisting the internalisation of experiences (Vygotsky, 1962) supported the promotion of language for learning. In terms of the personal growth model, Vygotsky's observation that speech for oneself evolved into

'inner speech,' revealed how the transformation from language to thought was accomplished.

In later writings, Britton focused more on Vygotsky's (and Luria's) articulation of the *social* nature of cognition, how socio-cultural conditions generated tools or 'auxiliary symbols' for learning in individuals which influenced new forms of behaviour (see Luria and Vygotsky, 1992: 114-117). Britton interpreted this idea of the importance of the social conditions of learning as meaning that a child's consciousness was shaped in interaction with others, in Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development'.³ In the liberal discourse of the personal growth model, however, *social* simply came to mean *interactive*, and the zone of proximal development was interpreted as a site of benign interactive processes. It constituted the discursive space in which a child's consciousness met a more mature adult consciousness, enabling the child to internalise gradually various forms of shared social behaviour. The zone was perceived as the 'cognitive world' in which both particularistic and universal meanings both originated and took shape for the child. The adult mediated these 'shared' meanings by both encouraging the expression of individual consciousness and by 'lending' consciousness to the child, helping the child become a member of a particular 'culture' or 'community.' For Britton, such communities were microcosms of the 'world;' they too were autonomous, objective environments within which interactive (social) learning took place,

³ Britton's increased attention to the importance of the interactive element of language and learning was no doubt part of the general shift from sole focus on intra-individual to interest in inter-individual learning that was brought about by a revision of Chomsky within education in the 1970s reported in Moon, 1988: 173-174.

Taking community in a micro sense, it is likely that we all live in a number of communities. As teachers, we are responsible for one of those—the classroom. It is clear we have a choice: we can operate so as to make that as rich an interactive learning community as we can, or we may continue to treat it as a captive audience for whatever instruction we choose to offer (Britton, 1987: 26).

In their reading of Vygotsky, Britton and the followers of the personal growth model continued to assume that the generation and patterning of meanings that occurred in interaction were transferable from the 'world' onto micro-contexts like the school and the family. Hence the source of pupils' and their adult mediators' meanings was never investigated beyond the immediate environment, (e. g., school-based knowledge), or the individuals themselves. Neither was the asymmetry of the relationship between teacher and student within the zone addressed, rather interactive learning was assumed to rid the classroom of the issue of the imbalance of power. Vygotsky was essentially recontextualised into a pedagogic theory that offered a rationalisation for language-based, interactive learning in the classroom. The zone demonstrated how children acquired the ability to regulate and refine their *individual* behaviour through language interactively with adults and/or peers—while the individual child remained the sole creator and innovator of his or her own meanings.

For Bernstein, in contrast, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development would not simply be viewed as a neutral (or potentially neutral) site for the creation or exchange of mutually-interpretable meanings. While Britton might have assumed that the presence of nurturing adults (teachers, parents, etc.) was all that was necessary to ensure successful interactive communication, Bernstein emphasised the diverse cultural *sources* (and resources) of both the meaning

makers and the meanings that were made. Bernstein's understanding of consciousness as sociologically and culturally patterned would suggest that within the zone, conflict and/or strategic negotiation over meaning would naturally occur.

Furthermore, for Bernstein, the zone would be the cognitive representation of a *social* world, hence the meanings as well as the 'tools' that were employed or made available within it—the social context of learning—would be subject to the uneven social regulation and distribution of the content and framing of the knowledge to be acquired and/or 'transmitted'. The regulation of experiences by language was mediated by adults transmitting, as it were, the 'codes' or organising principles of the social world(s) in which they themselves were located. Hence, adults were not simply enablers or facilitators but potentially shapers or, to greater and lesser extents, determiners of children's consciousness, for within the zone of proximal development, it was possible for an adult socialiser to bring meanings (and the rules for their articulation) that were not shared by the child and vice versa.

Like Vygotsky, Bernstein perceived that words and meanings constituted and were constitutive of the historical and cultural basis of individual minds. Bernstein, however, raised the issue of the external (and internal) constraints on the generation and ratification of 'legitimate' meanings in both micro and macro communicative contexts. For Bernstein, the fact that language was grounded in culture meant that it was necessarily subject to the influences of power and discursive regulation. Britton's Vygotsky, however, remained outside of Bernstein's view of culture as a site of contestation over meanings. For Britton, the zone of proximal development became a site of social

and discursive freedom; a cognitive space where the 'shared' meanings of a culture were discovered, articulated and made valid. Britton effectively neutralised social/cultural linguistic communication by suggesting that meanings were universally available in the 'world,' discovered rather than tacitly acquired, and openly exchanged and negotiated in interaction with others.

Culture into mind won't go: the political positioning of Bernstein in the intellectual field

In the end, English educators looked towards Britton and the personal growth model to define their agenda for the 1970s. Bernstein's conclusion that the educational process produced *socially* uneven products, due in part to different sets of sociolinguistic codes operating between pupils and schools, was not acceptable (or expressible) within the terms of the model. Instead, what was foregrounded was that, at the individual cognitive level, all pupils, regardless of class/cultural background, were equally, because innately, competent. The model sought to activate the role of the learner (the reader, the writer, etc.), focusing on the process of acquisition rather than on the (disparate) products that resulted. But while there was much gained from this developmental approach, the tendency within the personal growth model to separate innate potential or competence and actual performance also did much to obscure and/or deny the role of class and culture in language and learning.⁴

The separation of the individual from the social was also reproduced in the politics structuring the intellectual field of English

⁴ For an informed account of the strengths and weaknesses of the personal growth model and its relationship to the development of the English curriculum see (Burgess, 1985, 1988, 1993).

that emerged in the 1970s--and, consequently, the fate of Bernstein's position within the language paradigm was sealed. His insistence on the presence of the social dimension in linguistic and cognitive processes was deemed irrelevant to personal growth and was incongruous with the radical politics of equality and the liberal politics of relativism that had been mapped on to the intellectual field of the culture debates and which were now reappearing in the language paradigm.

The 'politics' of English teaching that coalesced in the 1970s around questions of language and culture came from a variety of political and intellectual sources from both inside and outside Britain. A 'radical' politics of equality developed within English education, exemplified in Harold Rosen's work, which represented working class language and culture as a source of creative expression and a means toward empowerment in the pedagogic context and beyond. In pursuit of a committed agenda to endorse the value of working class speech and find it a legitimate place in the classroom, however, Rosen and educators and researchers like him misrepresented the role and consequences of class and its relationship to language and culture. In attempting to politically interpret the personal growth model by welcoming linguistic diversity and multi-culturalism into the classroom, *they simultaneously retained its inadequate account of the social dimension of language and cognition.*

The indirect influence of Chomsky is apparent in Rosen's assumption that all languages carried the potential to express similar meanings and that similar meanings could therefore potentially be expressed in any language. This idea was at the heart of Rosen's critique of Bernstein (see Rosen, 1972). Bernstein's suggestion that

'potential' and 'actual' were subject to visible and invisible forces at work in the social structure was unrealisable in Rosen's framework. Moreover, Rosen ignored Bernstein's point that the *maintenance* of a class system presupposed an unequal distribution of symbolic as well as material capital, including access to particular forms of language and the meanings attached to these. He also neglected to engage with the related point that one of the aims of a class system is to mask and/or to restrict access to certain orientations to meaning and their linguistic realisations, particularly those in which a change in principles can occur, i. e., elaborated codes (Bernstein, 1972, 1972a).

Rosen's contribution to the language debates must be seen in the context of the New Left politics discussed with respect to the culture debates in previous chapters. His position within the language paradigm essentially paralleled his position on literature within the culture debates—to value working class language (the culture of the dominated) more and middle class language (the dominant culture) less. Rosen's primary political agenda to reinstate popular, working class culture and the forms of its expression as a legitimate presence in the classroom, however much it achieved, discouraged a broader conceptualisation of the links between language, culture and the social structure. His and the personal growth model's belief in the value of working class pupils' expressive/interactive linguistic contributions to the pedagogic context was converted into the idea that their expressivity was the means towards their liberation from educational and social inequality.

An important source of support for this position came from Labov's work in the 1970s on Black English Vernacular, reported most notably in 'The Logic of Nonstandard English' (Labov, 1972), one of the

cornerstones of sociolinguistics as applied to education. Labov's apparent demonstration of the underlying logical, grammatical structure in the speech of lower class black children articulated a 'scientifically' constructed argument against the deficit theories that had achieved prominence at that time both in Britain and the U. S. and into which Bernstein's work had unwittingly been drawn for support. Labov's assertion that "the logic of standard English cannot be distinguished from the logic of any other dialect of English" (Labov, 1972: 229) was congruent with the other ascendant strand of sociolinguistic theory that declared the potential equality of all languages, but with its intellectual roots in the work of Franz Boas not Chomsky.

The idea that all languages or language varieties were different but equal (i. e., all could be used to express the same thing) was used to argue against the idea that became associated with the 'deficit hypothesis,' that languages or language varieties might differ in terms of what they were able to express (i. e., all were 'deficient' or inadequate for the expression of certain meanings) due to the cultural and historical uses to which they had been put or, as Bernstein would have it, to the different social bases of their production. But while these ideas raised crucial questions about the relationship between language, culture and cognition, rather than becoming the focus of serious consideration in education, they were set up through the exigencies of the cultural politics of the period merely in opposition to one another. Moreover, within the 'deficit-difference debates,' the 'different but equal' position became the only politically acceptable one for left and

liberal educators and researchers to support.⁵ Labov concluded that verbal behaviour was determined not by cultural or verbal deprivation (inexpressible within a radical or a liberal, relativist position), but by the presence or absence of asymmetry or solidarity between speakers in a social situation (Labov, 1972: 212-213; and see Bernstein's critique of this hypothesis in Bernstein, 1990: 114-119). This supported Rosen's and the personal growth model's solution to educational inequality to be found in valuing working class language more and changing relations between teachers and students in the pedagogic context. However, it had the simultaneous effect of encouraging a disregard for Bernstein's related concern to locate the distinction between a potential and an actual use of language beyond the 'inequality' of a given social situation (as Labov had done) and within the schools and the social (class) structure itself, both of which acted selectively on legitimate meanings. Whereas in Labov and other sociolinguistic models, power is understood simply as the difference in weight between one speaker and another, for Bernstein, power may be locally enacted but it is socially generated. The social structure, according to Bernstein, worked

⁵ The extent to which the politics of this period influenced intellectual debate is also evident in the critique of sociolinguistics in general and Bernstein in particular published by the German linguist, Norbert Dittmar (Dittmar, 1976). Although Dittmar was critical of both the deficit and the difference models for advocating the *integration* of diversity in all its forms into capitalist society, his critique was most prominent for its apparent discrediting of Bernstein. In spite of evidence to the contrary, Dittmar identified Bernstein with the deficit hypothesis, failing to properly engage with Bernstein's attempts to link the class system with the unequal distribution of (discursive) power and control in society. In his critique, Dittmar missed two crucial and interrelated aspects of Bernstein's theory: the relationship between symbolic and economic power and the relationship between language, culture and thought. With regard to the latter, Dittmar rejected any significant relationship, appealing to Piaget and the idea of cognitive universals (Dittmar, 1976: 14-15). Dittmar's unwillingness to engage with the full scope of Bernstein's ideas further represented the tendency in this area during this period for political agendas to obscure intellectual ones. Dittmar has subsequently apologised to Bernstein for this, claiming political pressures from the student movement in Germany (see Bernstein, 1996).

both materially and symbolically on the regulation or ordering of experiences, establishing (and delimiting) the largely unconscious patterns of meaning that ruled individuals' responses to social, including pedagogic, situations.

In the end, the personal growth model, in conjunction with the particular politically-motivated applications of sociolinguistics in education discussed above, established a definition of culture in English education as 'environmental,' as something 'out there' in the world, distinct from Bernstein's conception of culture as 'social,' as something simultaneously 'in here' in the mind. The notion of cognition as a social activity was loosely interpreted as shared behaviour and learning in interaction with others, both of which assumed similarity and equality of input as well as output, regardless of social/linguistic background.

By developing the view in education of *the social world as detached from the cognitive one*—however much it appeared to honour difference over deficit—the *crucial issue of meaning* was eliminated from discussion, and with it serious consideration of the external/visible social processes at work on the internal/invisible development and structuring of human consciousness. The political exigencies of this period distracted attention from a more focused intellectual debate regarding language, culture and cognition in the context of the language paradigm. An explicit 'politics' of English teaching combined with the intellectual assumptions of the personal growth model to affect the recontextualisation of both Vygotsky and Bernstein within the context of education.

Sociolinguistics and the Language Paradigm

In addition to Labov's work, the intellectual and political fields of English education influenced several other selections and interpretations from sociolinguistics during this period. As unresolved issues from the culture debates re-emerged within the language debates, the field of sociolinguistics provided an important site for the formation of concepts of language and of culture that would predominate in English education during the 1970s and beyond.

Much of the early foundational work in the field of sociolinguistics (and Bernstein's work must be included here) set out to examine the relationship between the cognitive and the cultural dimensions of language with the aim of understanding the function of language in whole societies or subcultural groups within societies, including educational contexts (see Gumperz and Hymes, 1964; Fishman, 1968; Hymes, Cazden and John, 1971; Gumperz and Hymes, 1972; Giglioli, 1972; Pride and Holmes, 1972). The more theoretical, exploratory phase of sociolinguistics which is reflected in the above-cited anthologies, however, was supplanted, particularly in education, by a more applied phase which shifted attention away from some of the larger issues where matters of language, culture and cognition were concerned towards more immediate, pedagogically-oriented educational concerns.

As previously discussed, one of the important aims of the shift toward language study and away from literary criticism was to end the perceived elitism and high-cultural bias of the latter. Two approaches, informed by sociolinguistics, were used by educators and researchers in an effort to realise this goal. One was to focus on patterns of *language in terms of linguistic systems* which were sought as descriptive proof of

the equal validity of all linguistic varieties including dialects and non-standard forms. Language, in this case, tended to be perceived as an instrument or tool for the expression of ideas. The question of meaning was either not considered or was construed as socially neutral. This approach promoted the idea of linguistics as a science, as a technique for acquiring knowledge about language(s) rather than developing theories of language. The other approach was to focus on *language in use*. This involved a move away from the evaluation of socially 'correct' usages of grammatical forms towards the apparently value-neutral, functionally-driven 'appropriate' uses of language in different contexts. Here Hymes' notion of 'communicative competence' was an important point of reference as was Halliday's notion of 'register.'

In the 'applied' sociolinguistic tradition in English education these approaches contributed to a formulation of a view of language and culture that was designed to avoid the question of evaluation. In focusing on linguistics as, on the one hand, a value-neutral science, and on the other, by adopting a relativist view of languages as well as cultures, the notion of incommensurability was reintroduced into the language debates as a justification for withholding judgement, aesthetic or otherwise, regarding language varieties, as the title page in a Rosen publication indicated,

It seems hardly necessary to say that, since there is no place in linguistic discussion for aesthetic judgements, no such opinions have been expressed in the present book (Language and Class Workshop, 1974).

In the language debates, incommensurability did not imply that different languages were incommunicable, as it had with respect to

cultures, rather it was used to insist that all languages and language varieties were of *equal value* and, if called upon, could be put to the same use.

Language in Use: Incommensurability Revisited

The idea of the diversity and equality of all human languages was introduced by Franz Boas and continued by Leonard Bloomfield in what is generally referred to as American descriptivist or structural linguistics (see Hymes and Fought, 1975 for a comprehensive review of this school). One of the principal aims of this school of linguistics was to develop techniques for the careful description of languages in order to demonstrate their equivalence as linguistic systems. While Boas' interest in description included an explicit concern for the relationship between language and culture and the question of meaning, Bloomfield, a linguist not an anthropologist, dealt with the question of meaning more obliquely. Bloomfield perceived the relationship between meaning and linguistic form through a behaviourist model—a particular context stimulated a speaker's utterance and a hearer's response—in which culture did not necessarily play a part (although the account of Bloomfield in Hymes and Fought downplays Bloomfield's behaviourism and stresses his relationship to Sapir and Boas, it is nevertheless true that Bloomfield's dominant influence in linguistics steered the American tradition toward description and not interpretation). Bloomfield speculated over both materialistic and mentalistic explanations for why one utterance/response was given over another (Bloomfield, 1934: 32-33), ultimately rejecting the latter, whilst contending that, in both, meaning was ultimately only definable in contexts of use (Bloomfield, 1934: 144), "We have described the

meaning of a linguistic form as the situation in which the speaker utters it and the response which it calls forth in the hearer (Bloomfield, 1934: 139).

In the 1960s and 1970s, the question of language, meaning and contexts of use was further explored in certain cognitivist theories of culture and language in the field of anthropology that formed a significant part of the intellectual profile of the period and had particular impact in the field of sociolinguistics (see Tyler, 1969). A working definition of culture was developed within cognitive anthropology by the anthropologist, Ward Goodenough, which viewed culture as whatever any individual needed to know in order to function as a member of a group (Goodenough, 1964). According to this view, culture did not exist independently beyond individual membership, as in the notion of a collective unconscious, nor was it simply material phenomena themselves, e. g., people, behaviour, events. Rather, culture was believed to exist in the minds of each individual member of a society, as a set of rules or organising principles for generating behaviour appropriate to his/her culture. Thus, 'appropriate' linguistic or cultural responses to a given situation were seen as displays of knowledge of the mental models or rules which 'competent' native speakers possessed for perceiving and interpreting their own cultures.

Goodenough's definition of culture was submerged in Dell Hymes' sociolinguistic work of this period in concepts like 'communicative competence' and 'appropriateness.' Communicative competence assumed a 'knowing' subject who was able to use language appropriate to a given situation. It presented a view of competence that included not just the natural acquisition of the rules of grammar,

but the rules for its use in a variety of cultural contexts. The cognitivist theory of the mind on which these notions were based highlighted the idea of the socially competent individual rather than the features of his/her culture or language which permitted or constrained the acquisition of certain rules and not others. Hymes' representation of this theory provided a model for education that included the 'social' in the notion of competence and language use while at the same time suggesting that "...attention to the social dimension is [thus] not restricted to occasions on which social factors seem to interfere with or restrict the grammar" (Hymes, 1972: 278). In this model, individuals from different cultures were not competent in the *same* way, as in the personal growth model, but they were, nevertheless, *equally* competent. 'Communicative competence' thus became a slogan for cultural and linguistic relativism.

Although the idea of 'communicative competence' inserted a cultural account where mentalistic models of language use were concerned (for example, in Chomsky's approach), the question of how, why or, indeed if individuals or groups within the same or different cultures come to inhabit different world views was avoided. Following a major tendency within the Bloomfieldian tradition, the aim was more often to describe rather than analyse variability of behaviour amongst pupils. In the process, a view of language as a mere tool which all pupils possessed for the expression of meanings derived from their particular cultures was generated in education, and cultures were simply described as the environments in which divergent meanings were acquired. As a result, crucial questions that Bernstein's theory raised remained unanswered, for example, what were the sources of cultural meanings; how and why were particular linguistic

selections made in contexts of use by individuals and social groups; and how interpretable were the different orientations to meanings that obtained between individuals and social groups, i. e., was successful cross-cultural, cross-lingual communication probable and, if so, how might it be accomplished.

'The picture of the universe changes from tongue to tongue': the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis

The different interpretations of incommensurability that were present in education—that cultures were *incommunicable* and that languages were *equal*—left the question of whether all languages or language varieties could or did express the same *meanings* unresolved.⁶ Within the culture debates, educators had decided that cross-cultural consensus in literary criticism was impossible or undesirable or both. In the language debates, however, in embracing the difference model, they either avoided the question of whether linguistic differences, like cultural ones, implied the absence of the grounds for possible communication, e. g., "a reasonable minimum of common experience" or assumed (as in the culture debates) the absence of any potential common experience where linguistic differences were present. The lack of resolution of this critical issue is evident in the confused position that the field of sociolinguistics, in general, and the language paradigm, in particular, occupied in relation to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

⁶ Hymes and Fought, however, indicate that neither Boas, Bloomfield, Sapir nor Whorf considered that languages could differ from each other without limit; that "each indeed saw the importance of linguistics as residing partly in the universal properties it warranted" and that there was a continuity from Boas to Chomsky in the assumption of a universal analytical method (Hymes and Fought, 1975: 969).

As discussed above, Sapir proposed that language functioned not only as a tool for representing experience but also as a way of shaping or even defining experience for its speakers. In foregrounding the relationship of language to culture, and ultimately thought itself, they suggested that individuals and/or whole cultures were limited or extended by their language with regards to possible interpretations of the 'universe.' The implication was that where language differed, so did orientations to meaning. As Whorf expressed it,

We are thus introduced to a new principle of relativity, which holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated (Whorf, 1956: v).

Whorf's interest in linguistic relativity was not, as Hockett points out, primarily in the correlations found between a 'picture of the universe' and the lexical items that were available in any given language to express this picture (as in Boas' frequently cited example of the Eskimos' many words for snow). Rather, Whorf was interested in the 'thought worlds' that individuals carried around within them and by which they measured and understood what they could of the 'universe.' As Hockett suggests,

Whorf sought to dig deeper—to find correlations between the 'themes' of a community's culture on the one hand and, on the other, the general grammatical and semantic tenor of the associated language. More specifically, he sought evidence for instances in which the state of affairs in a language was either (a) symptomatic of underlying cultural themes, or perhaps even (b) causally responsible for the choice of one course of action rather than another in given circumstances (Hockett, 1954: 108-109).

Alternative interpretations of Sapir's and Whorf's writings appeared in sociolinguistics and in education during the 1970s. Although their hypothesis was generally discredited in its most deterministic form, it left a mark on formulations of language and culture that appeared (and continue to appear) in educational and other contexts. Sapir's writings were evident in theories of pedagogy where they were appealed to in support of heuristic models of the role of language in the classroom, although as shown above in relation to Britton, these tended to be only partial readings of his ideas, and Whorf in particular was relevant to Bernstein's elaboration of his code theory.

In a later period, Gumperz' work on 'inter-ethnic communication' (Gumperz, 1982) indirectly appealed to a number of explicit and implicit assumptions in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: that linguistic differences reflected cultural differences; that individuals' and cultures' 'world-views' were incommensurable; and that, therefore, where language variation occurred, the potential for incommunicability existed. Gumperz' suggestion that instances of failures to communicate between speakers of divergent linguistic backgrounds were often the result of their misreadings or intentional uses of culturally-specific communicative strategies supported these assumptions.

In order to draw this conclusion, however, Gumperz relied on an essentialised view of culture(s) that simultaneously downplayed *variation within* class/cultural groups. This view further suggested that individuals were often, if not always, trapped in their cultures through language and vice versa; they become viewed, to use Howard Giles' famous phrase, as 'sociolinguistic automata'. Moreover, it created the assumption that individuals were not capable of

interactively 'reading' their own and others' cultures through a process of translation or negotiation of social and cultural conventions into mutually-oriented or orienting communication. While this may sometimes be the case, in the 'inter-ethnic' communication model, cultural differences became a taken-for-granted *fact* rather than a *potentially* salient factor in problematic or unsuccessful linguistic interactions.

A similar critique (with respect to class) has been made of Bernstein's elaboration of Whorf, and there is a reading of Bernstein, like Whorf, which suggests that individuals or cultures are captives of the patterns of meanings implied by their language. However, unlike Whorf, Bernstein's theory does contain a 'get out' clause; it offers a dynamic rather than static account of the relationship between language, culture and thought. Underlying Bernstein's view that patterns of meanings and their linguistic realisations originate in the social structure (where 'thought worlds' collide) is the idea that language has a social/material as well as a social/symbolic base. What is reflected in and refracted through language is, according to Bernstein, the social order and individuals' relationship to and within it. Where this relationship remains dynamic, albeit subject to constraint, individuals are always potentially aware of their and others' social/linguistic behaviour. For Bernstein, the social runs through the mind—and it is therefore the changes to the social/material or social/symbolic base of linguistic production/reception which provide the key to the changes in the 'thought worlds' which individuals and cultures may and do inhabit.

Culture, Language and Action

Another claim for language study in English education was embodied in the work of Michael Halliday. The presence of the Hallidayan model of language in the intellectual field of English education, while it did not occupy as influential a position as either the Britton or Rosen models, nevertheless joined with them in discouraging attempts to reach a broader understanding of culture and its relationship to language. Despite Halliday's efforts to give his linguistic descriptions a social basis, his model of language, discussed below, supported a view of culture as functioning practically to solve the problems of modern living, inadvertently supporting the trend toward modernity described in Chapters Three and Four and contributing to the absence of any 'sociology of culture' within the language paradigm.

To whatever extent the concepts introduced through the newly developing language of sociolinguistics were taken up in Britain as part of the emergent language paradigm, Halliday himself did not share the cognitivist view that language functions were essentially subjective and based on individual competence. Halliday's intellectual genealogy can be traced to a rather different intellectual tradition (and has been by Halliday himself) through the functionalist anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski and the influential British linguist J. R. Firth. According to their approach, the unity of language and culture is achieved in *practical action* not in reflective thought or in the symbolic ordering of experience. As Malinowski suggested, "In its primitive uses, language functions as a link in concerted human activity...It is a mode of action and not an instrument of reflection...It is only in certain very special

uses among a civilised community and only in its highest uses that language is employed to frame and express thought" (Malinowski, 1923: 312). Language was seen by Malinowski and Firth as primarily a mode of social action, to speak was 'to do' (rather than 'to know' or 'to reflect'); its main function was pragmatic and *speech* was its most important form of expression.⁷ Furthermore, the meaning of any particular utterance was seen to reside in its function in a given 'context of situation' (Malinowski, 1923; Firth, 1957). But unlike the cognitivist model, 'appropriate' linguistic or cultural responses, rather than perceived as displays of a speaker's knowledge of and/or reflection upon a set of mental rules, were viewed as modes of human behaviour.

The model of language and culture which Halliday introduced into the English curriculum was located firmly within this 'functionalist' tradition.⁸ According to Halliday, speakers behaved linguistically in a given context based on an *objective* range of socially available options; these options comprised the set of alternative, *function-oriented* 'meaning potential' (also referred to as 'registers') that speakers had available to them and which were themselves the realisation of a higher-level semiotic system (alternately referred to by Halliday as a 'social semiotic,' a 'behaviour potential,' a 'social system' and, following Malinowski, the 'context of culture'). Halliday viewed

⁷ A different account of language as action was identified, of course, by J. L. Austin in 'How To Do Things With Words' and subsequently elaborated in the Speech Act Theory of J. Searle.

⁸ 'Functionalist' in Halliday's linguistic theory is not to be confused with functionalism as a mode of explanation in social theory. However, there are underlying similarities between Halliday's social concept of communication and Malinowski's. As Malinowski is considered a founding figure of functionalism, there may be more than an accidental congruence between Halliday's linguistics and Malinowski's social theory.

this range of semantic options as a realisation of a larger semiotic system which ultimately determined what one could *do* (as opposed to being a manifestation of what one *knew* as in the cognitivist model). For Halliday, as for Malinowski and Firth, meaning was doing, not thinking and the determination of available meanings in a given "context of situation" (as well as the linguistic realisation of these meanings) was an outcome of social not cognitive processes. Hence if, for cognitivists, culture was the knowledge one carried around in ones head, for Halliday, culture was the immediate social milieu in which meanings were learned and exchanged through function-oriented social/linguistic behaviour (Halliday, 1978, 1984).

In addition to Firth and Malinowski, Halliday has acknowledged a great debt to Basil Bernstein for his formulation of the relationship between social structure, meaning and lexico-grammar (see Halliday, 1969-70, 1971, 1973, 1978). Bernstein's concept of codes provided Halliday with a sociological theory for his linguistics at the same time that Halliday supplied Bernstein with a linguistic theory that was compatible with the sociological account of language he was developing at that time (for Bernstein's application of Halliday see Bernstein, 1971: 1-20, 1973). But while the collaboration between Bernstein and Halliday appeared on the surface to be based on a compatibility and convergence of their intellectual agendas, there are nonetheless important differences in their consideration of social and cultural processes and the role or function of language. These differences have gone unrecognised and yet had important implications for the different reception of their work in the educational field during the 1970s in particular. These differences become apparent

through a closer investigation of Halliday's use of the term *register* versus Bernstein's emphasis on the concept of *code*.

Register

As suggested above, for Halliday, register was always conceived in terms of language *doing*; it was considered as both a pragmatic response to and a function of a given social context. To this end, the notion of register was seen as an important development within the newly emerging linguistic paradigm. It provided a way in for teachers to focus on what pupils did with their own language in social interaction; it highlighted relevant language situations and the connections between languages and lived communities.

Halliday made use of the notion of register in his linguistic theory to emphasise the relationship between language use and situated activity; and to suggest that what we say is often to a considerable extent determined by situational factors. The term, as initially developed in Halliday (see Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens, 1964), was largely a descriptive device. It suggested the possibility of the creation of taxonomies of language use, linking appropriate varieties of language identifiable by lexical and grammatical features to particular contexts of situation. Three intersecting, classificatory concepts were also introduced, 'field,' 'mode' and 'style' (later, 'tenor') which served a further descriptive function. These three descriptive categories served to better define and identify situational registers of language use by highlighting specific aspects of language use that operated in a range of social contexts.

In relating register to social context, Halliday wished to establish a relationship between language function, i. e., the demands made on

language by individuals based on social, personal or material needs in particular social situations—and the form taken by the grammatical system of language; to view grammar as a “theory of human experience” as well as a principle of social action (Halliday, 1993: 7-8). Register or ‘meaning potential’ was a way of regarding the range of available options within the linguistic system which produced and were produced by the demands of ‘experience’ understood as accumulated social *situations*. The importance of register for Halliday was to show that function in combination with context was intrinsic to the nature of linguistic structure (Halliday, 1970).

A gradual ‘upgrading’ of the term ‘register’ occurred, however, which reveals a transformation of Halliday’s own theory and, in particular, his increasing attention to and interpretation of the ‘social’ aspect of sociolinguistics, due in large part to his association and collaboration with Bernstein (see Hasan, 1973). ‘Register’ came to be defined principally in terms of meaning—of semantic choices rather than syntactic, lexical or phonological patterns—and meaning emerged as central to Halliday’s ‘social’ theory of language,

A register can be defined as the configuration of semantic resources that the member of a culture typically associates with a situation type. It is a meaning potential that is accessible in a given social context (Halliday, 1978: 111).

For Halliday, however, and unlike Bernstein, meaning remained associated primarily with doing, with social action or function. This was based on his assertion that the function of language is the same thing as its meaning, and that an utterance can only be said to be meaningful when it contributes to (or functions towards) the

maintenance of forms of socially appropriate and interpretable behaviours or 'life patterns.' As Malinowski wrote,

The meaning of a word is not mysteriously contained in it but is rather an active effect of the sound uttered within the context of situation. The utterance of sound is a significant act indispensable in all forms of concerted human action. It is a type of behaviour strictly comparable to the handling of a tool, the wielding of a weapon, the performance of a ritual or the concluding of a contract. The use of words is in all these forms of human activity an indispensable correlate of manual and bodily behaviour (Malinowski, 1931: 622).

So for Malinowski a magic ritual, for example, would be observed and interpreted in terms of its effects and not as the symbol of some powerful moral/aesthetic elements of human nature. Halliday reiterated Malinowski's view that social functions and their linguistic realisations are ultimately deduced from utilitarian needs and that utterances primarily serve an instrumental function (like "handling a tool," etc.). The notion of register was intended to reflect this relationship between meaning and behaviour, or meaning *as* a form of social behaviour. For Halliday, the options or choices ('meaning potential') available in the language system were ultimately interpretable as responses to the perceived demands of a particular social situation. They were the means to an end; in making a particular choice, an individual 'acted upon' whatever desires or needs had been induced by the context of situation. Thus, for Halliday, 'learning to mean' was learning to make the appropriate social/linguistic choices, learning to 'do' the right thing in order to achieve certain proscribed ends.

Halliday, Bernstein and the 'social'

Halliday's concern with meaning became further elaborated, as suggested above, through his contact with Bernstein and the latter's sociological investigations into social/linguistic codes. For Halliday, Bernstein's code theory offered an explanation for the meanings 'opted' for in particular social situations,... "codes act as determinants of register, operating on the selection of meanings within situation types," and "the code is actualised in language through register, the clustering of semantic features according to situation type" (Halliday, 1978: 67-68). But although Halliday appropriated the concept of 'code' from Bernstein, it does not and, it will be argued, *cannot* perform the same for each of them due to fundamental differences in their respective theoretical approaches. In particular, Halliday's self-professed location within the Firthian tradition distances him from Bernstein in several critical ways.

For Halliday, and unlike Bernstein, the individual predates the social and the social is derived from, insofar as it exists at all, the aggregation of individuals. Halliday's individuals use language to fulfil their immediate needs and desires and it is through or on account of such behaviour that they are considered as 'social' beings. Individuals thus become 'socially situated' when, through some type of action, the fulfilment of some utilitarian need or desire is attempted or achieved. This is perfectly exemplified in Halliday's studies of the child, Nigel, 'learning how to mean,' in which Halliday derives sets of supposedly 'social' functions from Nigel's 'individual' functions which are organised around his achievement of particular ends (Halliday, 1975).

For Bernstein, however, society predates the individual. Bernstein, in the tradition of Durkheim, maintains the existence of a collective moral consciousness which forms the basis of particular forms of social action. Social action in this sense, however, is not primarily viewed as it is in Halliday as a pragmatic response to a particular social situation, or as the purveyor of ever-possible extensions of meanings which the language system can be seen to accommodate. Rather, it is understood as the symbolic representation of a distinctive belief and value system which both operates on and legitimates the action taken.

Bernstein's concern is, therefore, to identify the formal underlying principles or, in his terminology, 'codes' found across diverse social and cultural contexts which govern individual behaviour—principles which are linked to the differential distribution of power and principles of control operating on and within the social structure. For this reason, Bernstein's code theory, especially but not exclusively as elaborated through the principles of classification and framing, works to reduce categories and their combinations and relationships against Halliday's tendency to multiply them. This is clearly apparent in Bernstein's identification of what he calls 'critical socialising contexts,' which were reformulated from Halliday's earlier elaboration of six or seven functions of language. What had served for Halliday as essentially categories of language varieties (which were understood as functional varieties arising out of the needs or demands of a child) were transformed by Bernstein into four and finally two—the 'regulative' and the 'instructional'—socialising contexts. For Bernstein, however, these contexts were not merely illustrations of categories or patterns of language use as they were for Halliday, they

were considered crucial empirical sites to test the theory itself, for according to Bernstein, it was the regulative context which positioned individuals in the moral system and the instructional context which gave (and denied) access to specialised competencies (Bernstein, 1990).

With Halliday, however, 'critical socialising contexts' were dissolved into empirical 'situations.' He did not provide an exemplar of the formal principles at work in the regulatory context, but instead converted it into something quite different—a formally disconnected, inert object of *description*. Halliday presented the regulatory context as a site which, through the repetition of a language of rules and instructions, taught a child *how language can be used* to control behaviour (Halliday, 1969-70). For Bernstein, however, the regulatory context was important because it located the child within a particular moral system. It was the repetition, not of a particular *use* of language, but of a set of *tacitly acquired principles* of the social ordering of experience that made the regulatory context a critical socialiser.

Halliday's theory can, in the end, only account for the observable patterns which lie at the surface of discourse and which emerge in the choices that individuals make from the range of possibilities within the language system. Bernstein's code theory, on the other hand, offers an account of the generative social and symbolic basis of discursive practices. In attempting to use Bernstein's theory, Halliday fatally forces 'code' to the surface. As a result, code becomes simply an explanation in Halliday's work, of the way in which chunks of meaning or "clusters of semantic features" are organised within a particular "situation type."⁹ 'Code,' like the 'context of culture' lying

⁹ There is a similar tendency at work in Halliday's re-interpretation of the concepts 'field,' 'mode' and 'tenor' which, like register, underwent a transformation within

beyond the social context, never amounts to more than a descriptive backdrop; it is untheorisable within a functionalist perspective which lacks a notion of a pre-existing external social system. It is for this reason that any imperatives bearing on an individual from *without*, moral imperatives for instance, can find no place in Halliday's framework. He can have no account of moral action other than a utilitarian one such as that argued against by Durkheim, proposed by Bentham and the utilitarian liberals.

Halliday's dependence upon perpetual description is further served by a necessary removal of what links the individual to the social—the cognitive in all its cultural variants—and its replacement with a 'social situation' and a 'situation type' which may be endlessly added to depending on the particular society in which a social situation is found. This further distances him from Bernstein who includes the mind and cognitive processes in his sociolinguistic theory. Unlike Halliday, who explicitly rejected an intra-organism model such as that proposed by Hymes and the cognitive anthropological tradition (Halliday, 1978: 37-38), Bernstein, as discussed above, shared with Hymes an early interest in the ideas of Sapir and Whorf regarding the

his own theory. Initially, the terms 'field,' 'mode' and 'style' appeared as descriptive devices for elaborating different aspects of language in use. Thus, 'field' represented 'language activity in a situation,' 'mode' was the 'medium of the language activity' and 'style' referred to 'relations amongst participants' (Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens, 1964). When Halliday reintroduces these concepts at a later date, however (see Halliday, 1978), 'field' is characterised as 'type of social action,' 'mode' as 'symbolic organisation' and 'style' (now 'tenor') has moved from the third to the second dimension of register classification. More importantly, these concepts which began as descriptive devices, in the later formulations are claimed by Halliday to be *generative* aspects of a situation. As with register, Halliday attempts to transform the capacity of these terms to conceptualise rather than merely describe, by simply *claiming* that they serve an analytic function. However, there is no evidence of any shift in the function they serve as socio-linguistic concepts; both in theory and in practice they remain purely descriptive.

inter-relations of language and culture and in which there is an interest in and inclusion of the mind that is notably absent in Halliday.

Halliday's avoidance of the cognitive (by relegating it to the field of psycholinguistics) was inherited from both Malinowski and Firth. Though Malinowski was inconsistent and indecisive in his regard for the relationship between language and thought (see Henson, 1974; Sampson, 1980: 223-226), he ultimately preferred to give consideration to the *active effect* of the word. It is worth noting that while Malinowski developed his theory from observations of the speech of pre-literate communities, Halliday focused primarily on the speech of young children. For both of them, it would seem, the 'elementary' structures observed in both forms of language served as better exemplars of their belief that the primary use of language was to make things happen or, as Malinowski suggested, to serve as "a handle to acts and objects and not a definition of them" (Malinowski, 1923: 322).

Firth was even more explicit in his determination to avoid questions of the mind. He proposed a 'monist' approach in opposition to a 'dualist' explanation of meaning which subsumed the mind within the notion of a "whole man,"

As we know so little about the mind and as our study is essentially social, I shall cease to respect the duality of mind and body, thought and word, and be satisfied with the whole man, thinking and acting as a whole, in association with his fellows (Firth, 1957: 19).

For Firth, "wholeness" was built into "the body" which, he claimed, was "constantly taking part in activities directed to the conservation of the pattern of life" (Firth, 1957: 143). According to Firth, it was only through the description of such activities that linguists could account

for meaning, "a thoroughgoing contextual technique does not emphasise the relation between the terms of an historical process or of a mental process, but the interrelations of the terms of the actual observable context itself" (Firth, 1957: 19).

In their consideration of the relationship between thought and language, both Firth and Malinowski emphatically rejected the Durkheimian model of a collective consciousness (Malinowski, 1935; Firth, 1957: 179-181). Meaning was to be analysed in view of linguistic, not social, facts. According to Firth, the analysis of meaning should consist of,

a serial contextualisation of our facts, context within context, each one being a function, an organ of the bigger context, and all contexts finding a place in what might be called the context of culture (Firth, 1957: 32).

In the end, however, Firth's 'monist' view left him (and later Halliday) with nothing other than the 'context of situation' (or the even more elusive 'context of culture') to account for meaning (see discussion in Lyons, 1966). Hence Halliday's ever-expanding 'social semiotic' heads increasingly upwards to ever more vague notions of some totality of all possible situations (similar to the totality of domains described by Fishman in Pride and Holmes, 1972: 18-19). Halliday's conception of the social system is a transposition of a systemic linguistic model—linguistic not sociological in origin—based on a model of language systems as comprised of levels of realisation. His orientation to meaning, despite his association with Bernstein, remains tied to functionalist, systemic grammar—and doubt has even been cast on the potential for systemic grammar to adequately account for meaning (see Sampson, 1980; Lyons, 1981).

Sampson has suggested that within systemic grammar greater attention is placed on naming the range of options open to the speaker than in specifying how these choices are realised as utterances. He notes that systems are..."identified in terms of the analyst's intuitive feelings for semantic relationships; and the rules for realising given syntactic choices are left relatively informal, whereas the systems of choices and their interrelationships are made very explicit and formal" (Sampson, 1980: 230). For systemic grammarians then, and Halliday proves no exception, the emphasis is on the identification of formal rules within the linguistic system, not the social order. So what starts out as a principle of order in Bernstein's code theory ends up, in Halliday's work, as mere inert social objects, arranged in some variously described hierarchical array.

Halliday's emphasis on the instrumental and away from the symbolic aspect of language contributed to the growing tendency within the English curriculum to perceive the social and the cultural as mere 'environments' within which language practices occurred. Although Halliday may have acknowledged and emphasised social class and regional dialects, hence socially or culturally locating his speakers, as demonstrated above, the 'socio' linguistic behaviour of Halliday's social actors was not motivated by their location in a symbolic system but rather by *pragmatic self-interest*; it was culture as practical and functional, as a place to get things done. Sahlins, in a forceful critique of the functionalist school of anthropology, has pointed to its tendency to reduce culture to "an epiphenomenon of purposeful 'decision-making' processes" (Sahlins, 1976: 86). And as he suggests,

...the effect of Malinowski's resolution of cultural content to biological function, particularly of the symbolic to the instrumental, is a final solution to the culture problem. For it becomes explicit that culture does not warrant any special understanding, that is, as distinct from a biological explanation. In this event, culture disappears (Sahlins, 1976: 87).

By the 1980s, though not exclusively due to Hallidayan linguistics, culture had indeed 'disappeared' as an issue in English teaching. By this time, critical questions regarding the relationship between language and culture and its implications for learning, ceased to have repercussions as a debate, i. e., as conflicting values.¹⁰ The assertions about culture and language that had been offered by both Leavis and Bernstein had been rendered illegitimate by the politics of the intellectual field of English education, first with regards to literature and then to language.

The preoccupation, in the relativist climate, with the idea of the incommensurability of cultures and of languages problematised an idea that can be found in both Leavis' and Bernstein's interest in the role of language in culture—the undeniability of evaluation. Both, in different ways, implied that 'sensibilities,' or patterns of meaning, were formed and reformed through language, which served to shape, maintain and/or extend the boundaries of 'thought worlds' and the social/symbolic order. For both, changes in meaning had the potential to occur when members of a culture entered into some (linguistic) relationship—through a text and in a context—other than one with

¹⁰ The same was not true in the universities or in the emerging field of Cultural Studies where the culture debates were continued. Eventually the issues raised in these debates did re-enter English in some form through Media Studies which became an established part of the field of English teaching, but by this time the idea of literature as a central armature for these discussions had disappeared.

which they were already certain or familiar. Although Bernstein may have located the source of any ultimate change in language and culture in the material base (as suggested earlier, his 'get out' clause was found in the relationship between macro and micro, social and linguistic organisation) as opposed to Leavis who identified solely with the symbolic, both understood the important role that conflicting values, a prerequisite of critical evaluation, played in both sustaining *and* altering 'cultured' meanings. While Leavis himself may have failed to extend the circle of engaged critics wide enough and while Bernstein's theory may have suggested that speakers of a particular language variety were overly constrained by it, their approaches to language and culture suggest the *possibility*, at least, of the *transcendence* of linguistic constraints, not the maintenance of linguistic orderliness.

The 'disappearance' of Leavis and Bernstein from the intellectual field of English education solidified certain tendencies within it with regard to efforts to conceptualise language and culture for pedagogic purposes. The political and pedagogic agenda that characterised the post-war period through the 1970s prioritised the empowerment of working class pupils by emphasising their class/cultural forms of expression, but, in so doing, it overlooked the fact of cultural mixing and downplayed the possibility of 'cross-cultural' communication. The stress on relativism, difference and incommensurability that distinguished this period made the possibility or probability of the *commensurability* of cultures inconceivable. The variety of intellectual traditions that informed the conceptualisations of language and culture in English education were recontextualised during this period to fulfil a political/pedagogical agenda rather than being mined for their recognition of the complexities of the

relationship between language, culture and thought. As a result, the possibility of communicating through similarities and across differences remained inadequately explored.

Chapter Six

Unity in Diversity

This chapter considers the possibility of transcending the persistent polarities and contradictions that surfaced in the culture and language debates in the context of English education and that continue to appear in contemporary debates about language, culture and identity. To this end, it explores some of the theoretical and philosophical assumptions with respect to language, culture and the 'quest for commensurability' that underlie the debates that took place within English education in Britain.

Many of the ideas that came to fruition in the culture and language debates had had a long gestation period through work in the philosophy of language and in cultural anthropology. The influence of Franz Boas has already been mentioned in the preceding chapter. His pioneering work on the linguistic classification of Native American languages helped to establish a scientific account of dialects and 'non-standard' linguistic varieties which complemented folkloristic accounts and, more importantly, that came to be the primary source of the argument in the educational field that all languages and dialects were 'equally valid.' Of equal relevance and importance, however, are the ideas on language and culture expressed by the three German thinkers, J. G. Hamann, J. G. Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt, all of whom directly or indirectly informed the contributions of Boas, Sapir and Whorf (Brown, 1967; Penn, 1972; Hymes and Fought, 1975). Although other than in Hymes' customarily scholarly studies, the debt to these authors has remained largely unconscious in the field of educational sociolinguistics (although see Hewitt, 1989), an

examination of their ideas provides a much needed landscape on which to locate the positions of key participants of the language and culture debates in the 1960s and 1970s in British education and contribute insight into a number of important underlying intellectual issues.

What most distinguished Hamann, Herder and von Humboldt from their contemporaries, and makes their writings particularly relevant to current debates about culture and cognition, was their recognition of the role of language in structuring experience. Eighteenth century rationalist and empiricist accounts of knowledge, including, importantly, the influential Kant, for the most part ignored the function of language in cognition. At the start of the eighteenth century the two views with respect to language that prevailed were that language had been given to humans by God and/or that it was the invention of human reason. Rationalists like Leibniz, for example, believed in the possibility of a logically perfect language (Apel, 1977; Toulmin, 1990), continually refashioned by reason to reflect the basic God-given structure of reality, while Locke, from a more empiricist point of view, had suggested that language was created by humans in order to turn the invisible ideas located inside their minds into visible words of exchange. According to Locke, language was the result of a rational social contract, created by rational human beings who invented words in order to communicate their thoughts to each other,

The comfort and advantage of society not being to be had without communication of thoughts, it was necessary that man should find out some external visible signs, whereof those invisible ideas, which his thoughts are made up of, might be made known to others (Locke, quoted in Brown, 1967: 25).

Hamann, however, astonishingly before his time, insisted that thought and language were one and the same cognitive process; that language was inseparable from the world because it was the vehicle of human's perceptions of themselves and of the natural world. It is surprising that this idea is so often associated with the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy of the twentieth century and rarely attributed to Hamann, even though as early as 1784, Hamann had argued his views in his *Metacritique* against Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*,

Therefore, if it still remains a chief question, how the ability to think is possible—the ability to think right and left, before and without, with and beyond experience, then it needs no deduction to prove the genealogical priority of language and its heraldry over the seven holy functions of logical propositions and inferences. Not only does the whole ability to think rest upon language...but language is also the central point of reason's misunderstanding of itself...(Hamann, 1784: 216).

Hamann would spend his entire life arguing for the inseparability of language and thought, and many aspects of his thinking on this subject would be echoed subsequently in both Herder's and von Humboldt's writings. All three proposed extremely creative and innovative ideas about the relationship between language, culture and thought so very long before the present, although they also diverged from each other significantly on many points. The relevance of their important, though often unrecognised, contributions to contemporary debates on this theme will be evident in the discussion below.

Before discussing the distinctive contributions of Hamann, Herder and von Humboldt, however, it is important to consider their origins within the schools of empiricist and rationalist thought that characterised eighteenth century Enlightenment philosophy, since all

three retained aspects of empiricist and/or rationalist thought in their writings. Hamann, for example, embraced empiricism, and especially Hume, for its privileging of sense experience. And Kant, as well as the rationalist Leibniz, contributed to the development of Herder's thinking and understanding of the relationship between language, culture and history, despite his critique of Kant (his former teacher) and his opposition to certain forms of rationalist thinking. The influence of Kant is also evident in von Humboldt and contributed to important differences in his development of many of Herder's ideas.

The World Brought into Being

The debate between rationalists and empiricists was over epistemology; how human beings come to 'know' the world, whether all humans 'know' the same world or know the world in the same way. Rationalists held that knowledge of the world was based on the inner subjective world of the mind, that it was innate. They believed in the possibility of objective knowledge, uncontaminated by the point of view of any observer and derivable from reason alone. Empiricists, on the other hand, believed that the world was brought into being experientially, through sensory data. For empiricists like Locke and Hume, for example, things in the world were copied by the mind in order to form first simple and then complex ideas. Locke identified two stages in this process of perception. The first 'appearances' in the mind he referred to as 'ideas of sensation,' the raw materials of experience, which were followed by what he called 'ideas of reflection.' Locke, however, conceded that there were certain ideas that were not contained in the existence of things and that were in principle unobservable. He thus ended up approximating a more rationalist

position by assuming the mind's ability to derive ideas from itself. Hume, on the other hand, accepted that absolute certainty of reality was impossible and restricted his theory of knowledge to the evidence offered by observation alone. He identified the elementary data of experience as 'impressions' and suggested that the passing from impressions to 'ideas,' (in Hume's view the weaker moment of reflection), was determined not by reason, but as a result of habit or an act of faith,

...when I am convinced of any principle, it is only an idea which strikes more strongly upon me. When I give the preference to one set of arguments above another, I do nothing but decide from my feeling concerning the superiority of their influence...all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are derived from nothing but custom, and belief is more properly an act of the sensitive than of the cogitative part of our nature (Hume, in Copleston, 1985: 290).

For empiricists, then, the foundations of knowledge were to be found in immediate intuitions, sensory data that were so 'directly given' that they were completely independent of the process of thinking.¹ The empiricist mind was an observer and collector of records of facts or appearances; it relied on faith in its own individual perceptions that the knowledge that it acquired represented actual reality. Moreover, the empiricist mind was unlimited in terms of the ideas it could support. Given the right experience, any logically possible thoughts or concepts, however complex, could be held in the mind (Hundert, 1989).

¹ Yolton, however, argues that for Locke, ideas, perceptions and thoughts were considered *cognitive* counterparts, responses or translations of physical stimuli, not simply images or representations of the world mirrored through a glass eye (Yolton, 1990).

Rationalists, on the other hand, located the foundations of knowledge in basic unchanging concepts which defined the character of thought. The rationalist mind was the realisation of a universe that existed through an immutable and transcendental Substance analogous to God. It relied on faith, not in its own individual perceptions, but in some other transcendental source, most often understood to be God, that it was not being deceived by what it saw.

Kant attempted to unify these points by asserting that the basis of all human knowledge was certainly received from the outside world, as the empiricists had claimed, but that human beings themselves organised this data through the imposition of a priori forms and categories. The world of experience, the phenomenal world of appearance, was thus not simply the construction of human beings nor was it unconstrained by complexities, as the empiricists has suggested. It was rather the outcome of innate, conceptual categories that established the *necessary conditions* of possible experience.

Kant believed in pure reason, but unlike the rationalists, he believed that the mind required the senses to give content to innate categories. In spite of Kant's attempt to synthesise sensibility and understanding, however, the world that he brought into being remained essentially the phenomenal world only, as it had for the empiricists. Because for Kant reality was relative to consciousness, (all our thoughts are only about things as they *appear* in the mind), in order to answer the question of how we come to know things as they *are*, e. g., where do colour, shape or texture come from, he posited the existence of a noumenal world, the world of things-in-themselves—but this was a world that humans could never know because the world was accessible to them only through innate categories of the mind and

the perceptions which these engendered unveiled a reality that was necessarily separate and distinct from the world of things-in-themselves.

So although Kant explored foundations of human knowledge that were neither solely innate nor experiential, he underemphasised the role of an active, creative and *unconstrained* perceiving mind. Moreover, as Edward Hundert suggests, Kant was more interested in the contribution of thoughts to things, he emphasised the mind's participation in the world rather than the world's participation in the mind,

The Kantian direction of Kant's philosophy arises from the direction of Kant's reasoning. Kant began with self-conscious experience and 'deduced' the external world—he built his system *from* thoughts *to* things. Kant's 'I' became the active *subject* of experience (in contrast to a mere Cartesian 'thinking object'), but, even in providing the regal activity of bestowing concepts on that which it knows, it was still an observational 'I', a passive spectator in the world. Kant's 'I' merely *has* knowledge, 'facts' about a dead world of objects which we come to know as round or square, black or white, sweet or sour (Hundert, 1989: 38, original italics).

It was this image of humans as passive and constrained spectators that was rejected by Hamann and Herder. They refused to embrace Kant's idea of reason as an innate and independent activity and insisted on a view of reason as creative energy, evolving out of human relationships, in relationship to God, and most importantly, structured in and by language. Against Kant's attempt at a synthesis of experience and the understanding within the *mind*, Hamann and Herder insisted on a unity within *language* of the perceptive and reflective processes of the mind.

The Ubiquity of Language

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the rational and divine origins of language began to be widely challenged by different variations of an expressivist theory of language which claimed that language was primarily instinctual and emotional, not rational and social, in character. Thinkers as diverse as Condillac and Rousseau in France, Blackwell in England and Vico in Italy embraced the view that language was the expression of human passions and sensory images, that it sprang from sensual or biological needs, from the impulsive, natural cries of human beings, and was not a mere operation of the intellect (Abrams, 1958; Brown, 1967; Berlin, 1976).² They all understood language to embody the feelings and passions of a people. The general view was that the earliest sounds of individuals gave rise to songs and these to speech, and that images produced metaphors which were elaborated in myth, poetry and the language of the 'folk.'

The privileging of primitive speech, of the everyday language of the people and of poetry over prose for reflecting 'human nature' is a constant theme echoed in Hamann and Herder. Hamann referred to poetry as "the mother tongue of the human race; even as the garden is older than the ploughed field, painting than script; as song is more ancient than declamation; parables older than reasoning; barter than trade... (Hamann, 1762: 141). Because poetry, drama, and the 'vernacular' were amongst the 'first-born' expressions of every culture, they were deemed the most authentic linguistic products of the nations

² Amongst this group, Vico in particular would develop many of the same ideas about language and culture that Hamann and Herder would, although there is little evidence that they read each others work. For a discussion of the important contributions of Vico to the themes being discussed in this chapter, see Berlin, 1976.

in which they were sung, spoken or written. Through engagement with the active, sensual aspects of nature, poets produced, in Hamann's words (alluding to Shakespeare), the "rolling thunder of eloquence" and "its companion, the single-syllabled lightening flash" (Hamann, 1762: 146). But in contrast to other expressivist theorists, Hamann and Herder each in different ways reclaimed for reason a direct relationship to such 'natural language' forms. They rejected the idea that reason was only to be found in the abstract words of philosophers and looked to the 'intuitive reason' of poetry and the vernacular in order to uncover the 'truths' or essences of things.

For Hamann, in particular, any form of abstraction was the 'castration' of thought (O'Flaherty, 1988: 147-149), while intuition endowed it with spirit. For Hamann, language was the text of nature, of creation, thus he believed that all knowledge must have a sexual, life-affirming component. Equating sexuality with intuitive knowledge and castration with abstraction, Hamann suggested that to attempt to reform language in the light of reason was to "diminish its strength and manhood," to render it sterile and colourless, lacking the capacity to address itself to the whole of human nature (O'Flaherty, 1988: 31-40). The rationalists were attempting to destroy nature by denying the senses and the passions, according to Hamann, who wrote in response,...the *pudenda* of our organisms are so closely united to the secret depths of our *heart* and *brain* that a total rupture of this natural union is impossible (Hamann, quoted in Berlin, 1993: 62). Hamann, furthermore, linked sexuality with faith in God. Therefore, any attempt to contain language, and hence the spirit, in the name of reason was to blaspheme against God, for it was in nature, including language, that God was revealed.

Reason is language, logos. On this marrowbone I gnaw, and shall gnaw myself to death on it. J. G. Hamann

Hamann argued against reason as an independent activity that took place inside the mind and preceded language. Instead, he maintained that reason and language were inseparable, "...without a word, no reason—no world" (Hamann, 1783: 248). Hamann believed, in opposition to the Enlightenment belief in a separate faculty of reason, whether innately or experientially derived, that it was in language, especially in such symbolic forms as myth and poetry, that humans interactively, in communication with one another, both perceived their own experiences and reflected upon them.

For Hamann, like the empiricists, knowledge of the world was derived *from* the world through the accumulation of past beliefs, of history and tradition, "Sense experience and knowledge of reason both rest upon relationships of things, of their qualities, with the tools of our receptivity, as upon the relationships of our conceptions. It is pure idealism to separate believing and sense-experiencing from thinking" (Hamann, 1787: 257). Hume especially appealed to Hamann for his insistence that belief was the unifying force behind all sensory experience. But Hamann added to Hume's empiricism the idea that belief was rendered through symbols, especially language. For Hamann, reason, and the faith upon which it was built, depended on symbolism. And whereas Locke had united reason and experience in the metaphoric 'tabula rasa' of the mind, Hamann joined both of these in language, in the word and ultimately in God,

Every phenomenon of nature was a word—the sign, symbol and pledge of a new inexpressible, but all the more intimate union,

communication and community of divine energy and ideas. Everything that man heard in the beginning, saw with his eyes, contemplated, and his hands touched was a living word. With this word in his mouth and in his heart, the origin of language was as natural, as near, and as easy as child's play (Hamann, quoted in O'Flaherty, 1952: 38).

While Hamann asserted the spiritual origins of language, he rejected the idea that God provided human beings with a fully-formed language prior to the development of human reason. Indeed, he rejected the idea that nature was modelled on some divine plan and dismissed the idea that human beings could ever totally mirror or reach a complete understanding of God's divine purpose, "Heaven be thanked that there is a Being high above the stars that can say of himself: I am that I am—let everything under the moon be mutable and capricious" (Hamann, quoted in O'Flaherty, 1952: 40). For Hamann, the only thing that humans could and should do was seek to illuminate God's purpose by understanding themselves through understanding others. Such understanding, however, was acquired through engagement in the particularities and mutability of human experience, especially language, it was not given directly by God or revealed through abstract concepts or appeals to universal, necessary truths.

While Hamann believed that language was provided by God, he insisted that it was shaped by and evolved out of the "natural mentality" of the people (Penn, 1973: 50-51). Thus he stressed the active and creative role of language in establishing traditions and affirming or reforming beliefs. For Hamann, the task of the people, particularly the poetic geniuses amongst them, was to work on and interfere with language through the creation of new phrases or new combinations of symbols or sense-units. This was not the same as the

rationalist tendency to invent new *words*, i. e., abstract symbols, in an attempt to perfect language to make it a more precise instrument of thought, as Leibniz had suggested. Hamann believed that only poetic language, the text of nature, was capable of interpreting and reinterpreting nature precisely because it embodied the apparent *contradictions* in nature (while affirming God's existence) and did not attempt to dissolve them in some mathematico-logico harmony (O'Flaherty, 1952: 26-29).

Language was the means by which humans grasped God's image, through their "experience of the presence of things" (Smith, 1960: 71), but for Hamann, only God could finally reconcile the contradictory elements of experience (O'Flaherty, 1988). He therefore dismissed the possibility or desirability of seeking universal truths in experience since, "Here on earth we live on fragments. Our thoughts are fragments. Our knowledge itself is patchwork." (Hamann, 1758: 161) and "all events of world history are silhouettes of more mysterious actions and disclosed miracles" (Hamann, quoted in Smith, 1960: 93). Hamann, however, did believe that human beings could and should strive to move beyond the individual or cultural particularities which shaped them, but he insisted that the most that humans could hope to realise collectively or universally was a closer relationship to God. And this they could achieve by engaging in an unfettered and sensual relationship with the natural world and by reading the bible. For it was in nature, in language (especially the Word of God), and in communion with others where God spoke to human beings in a language that was simultaneously 'poetic,' 'living' and 'divine' and where God's invisible harmony was revealed (Smith, 1960; O'Flaherty, 1988). As Berlin comments,

...Hamann's constantly repeated point is that revelation is direct contact between one spirit and another, God and ourselves. What we see, hear, understand, is directly given. Yet we are not mere passive receptacles, as Locke had taught; our active and creative powers are empirical attributes that different men or societies have in different degrees and kinds, so that no generalisations can be guaranteed to hold for too long. Hamann boldly turns Humean scepticism into an affirmation of belief—in empirical knowledge—that is its own guarantee; the ultimate datum, for which it makes no sense to ask for some general rationale (Berlin, 1993: 34).

It must be remembered, however, despite Hamann's belief in empirical knowledge as the "ultimate datum," unlike Hume, he never denied the importance of reason. Hamann's empiricist orientation did not lead him to exclude the role of reason in all cognition. His complaint against the Enlightenment, and Kant in particular, was not that reason was emphasised at the *expense* of emotions. What Hamann insisted upon was the existence of a *different* mode of reason, one that, as O'Flaherty suggests, was 'intuitive' rather than 'abstract' and that ..."[had] as its basis a dialectical rather than a formal logic"... (O'Flaherty, 1988: xiv). For Hamann, that dialectic involved language and experience, and above all, God. It was this reformulation of reason and its inextricable link to language that would be taken up by Herder.

Man, endowed with mind—a characteristic peculiar to himself alone—has by his very first act of spontaneous reflection invented language.
J. G. Herder

Hamann's influence, particularly his idea of the inseparability of language and reason, is clearly evident in much of Herder's writings. One of Herder's most important elaborations of this idea came in his prize-winning response to the question of the 'origin of language' in a competition presented by the Royal Academy of Sciences in Berlin in 1770. Herder's essay challenged the very idea of raising the question of

language's origins; he responded to the essay question only indirectly, considering what for him was the more relevant question, the nature and use of language, not its origins (Clark, 1955: 130-132).

Herder sought to demonstrate that as language and reason were one, and that as 'to reason' was 'to be human', then 'to speak,' 'to think' and 'to be human' must be all one and the same activity—and language, therefore, had no distinctive 'origin.' He directed his argument against two of the dominant theories of language of his day—the divine origin theory as proposed by Sussmilch and the expressivist theories proposed by Condillac and Rousseau. Sussmilch had held that language was a gift from God, but not in the same co-active way that Hamann had understood this. Sussmilch suggested that God had intervened to solve the puzzle of how humans might reason without language whilst needing language in order to reason. He concluded that, "no man could have invented language for himself, because the invention of language requires reason, consequently, language must have already existed before the mind was used" (Sussmilch, quoted in Herder, 1770: 137). Herder challenged Sussmilch's separation of language and thought by asking how humans could have received language from God if they were not already endowed with reason which assumed the use of the mind. Herder credited God not with the gift of language but with "the creation of a human mind capable of forming and creating language by its own powers" (Herder, 1770: 176).³ Herder's argument against

³ Hamann accused Herder of siding with the rationalists in trying to understand humans apart from God. For Hamann, the perceptive and reflective capacities of the mind symbolised the dual nature of natural (but not abstract) language, its capacity to differentiate on the basis of real objects and real relations. This 'duality in unity,' as O'Flaherty refers to it, of natural language further symbolised for Hamann the dual nature, human and divine, of the origins of language. For

Condillac and Rousseau was primarily with their identification of the origins of human language in the earliest natural sounds and outcries of emotion of human beings. Herder objected to Condillac's claim that these early sounds were somehow transformed into a human language simply through the emergence of associations and agreed conventions between individuals, and he criticised Rousseau for trying to solve Sussmilch's paradox by locating the origins of language in feelings and desires alone. Herder accepted that emotive sounds formed a part of human language but to associate them with the origins of human language was wrong—"these sounds are not the main thread of human speech, not its roots, but the sap which vitalises them" (Herder, 1770: 119)—because, according to Herder, from the beginning language was inextricably tied to reason,

We may develop, refine and organise these cries as we will, but if reason and the understanding do not intervene to enable us to make conscious use of the sounds, I do not see how a human language could ever evolve. Children utter emotional sounds like animals, but is not the language they learn from man of a very different kind? (Herder, 1770: 125).

Herder believed that as God had provided animals with heightened instincts and senses which humans had been deprived of, so humans had been granted other powers to take their place. Thus humans, even the smallest child, had the capacity for thought and for conscious reflection along with the 'powers' to realise these capacities. These 'powers,' the organisation of the intellect, the mind, in Herder's words, "the entire economy of man's perceptive, cognitive, and

Herder to attempt to disassociate God from language was therefore, according to Hamann, not only irreligious but also false (O'Flaherty, 1952).

volitional nature," (Herder, 1770: 131) were what constituted a distinctly *human* (as opposed to animal) nature, and it was in human *language*, "the corollary of a reflective mind," (Barnard, 1965: 56) that these God-given powers were revealed.

The Power of Thought: 'Besonnenheit' and 'Kraft'

For Herder, as for Hamann, reason was both product and process, both being and becoming, performed by living human beings who were metaphysically and physically a whole. Reason was not some disconnected faculty of the mind, as Kant and his followers had claimed, on the contrary, it represented the organic *unity* of the mind. One of Herder's main arguments with Kant was that he made reason or 'the understanding' a separate faculty of the mind and one that constrained the possibilities of thought rather than supplied humans with reasoning powers (Clark, 1955: 396-412). Although both Kant and Herder attempted to synthesise metaphysical and empirical elements within an organic model derived from the biological sciences, Herder identified language, not *a priori* categories, (mere "metaphysical abstractions" as far as Herder was concerned) as structuring consciousness. This difference was a crucial one for Herder, for as he attempted to demonstrate, language was active and transforming while 'the understanding' was passive and limiting.

Herder's reference to the mind as an organic 'totality of powers' is best understood in relation to two metaphysical/psychological concepts that feature in his writings, the German terms, *Besonnenheit* and *Kraft*. As Clark has commented, for Herder, "man is not man unless and until he possesses the psychological state of *Besonnenheit*, or reflection, a result of the disposition of his psychic powers or forces

of *Kraft*..." (Clark, 1955: 133). Herder used the concept *Besonnenheit* to denote the innate possession of a creative and reflective mind perceived as an interactive, organic whole. Unlike Locke who understood the empirical moment as perception *followed* by reflection, Herder viewed experience (the linguistic moment) as the simultaneous moment of perception and reflection—a single creative process (Barnard, 1965: 32-33)—and the act of a perceiving mind. Reflection was formed by experience, it was an assemblage of the experiences and observations of the mind.

The illustrative moment of *Besonnenheit* was likened by Herder to a human "stepping into the universe" and an ocean of sensations rushing in, amongst these the sense of hearing, which out of all of the five senses, Herder regarded as "the proper gateway to the mind and the bond of association of other senses"—and the one that was instrumental in the invention of human language (Herder, 1770: 145-146).⁴

Herder's understanding of the 'monistic' nature of this experience was similar to Hamann's proposition of a 'duality in unity' in natural language, but Herder appealed to the concept of *Kraft* instead of God, introducing the idea of an internal, metaphysical principle of development which stimulated this activity. The term *Kraft* was the Middle High German translation of the medieval term 'vis' meaning faculty or power. Herder appropriated the term from its use in the

⁴ It has been recognised by several scholars that Herder's emphasis on the oral and auditory aspect of language anticipated developments in modern linguistics (see Sapir, 1909; Barnard, 1969; Mueller-Vollmer, 1990). Mueller-Vollmer contends that Herder was the precursor to Saussure in pointing out the linearity of the auditory sign. He suggests that Herder related the syntagmatic sequel of speech sounds to an inner sense of time which allowed the mind 'to abstract' and 'to speak' simultaneously (Mueller-Vollmer, 1990).

biological sciences, where it referred to the plurality of physiological forces operating within the human body, and gave it a metaphysical function. *Krafte* came to signify the totality of interacting human mental energies or forces, the interplay of which, for Herder, constituted all movement and growth. This energy—basic mechanical and biological forces, the latter including the psychological—was, according to Herder, organised and unified in the personalities of human individuals, as well as whole cultures (Clark, 1942). The activity of *Krafte* was central to Herder's understanding of human language and human culture. *Krafte* were for Herder the psychic energies—the ultimate *Kraft* being God—that 'powered' human consciousness.

To illustrate how *Kraft* operated, Herder drew on the organic metaphors that were prevalent in German Romantic thought in the eighteenth century and which were themselves an outcome of advances in the biological sciences (Abrams, 1958; Brown, 1967). He was particularly influenced by the rationalist Leibniz who, in opposition to the orthodox mechanical view of the universe as simply the sum of its parts, presented the world as an organism, "a whole unfolding its multiple aspects, where the parts were not merely constitutive elements, but individual entities existing in their own right" (Barnard, 1965: 11). Leibniz perceived the universe as a community of 'monads' (analogous to souls) each of which developed according to its own constitution as far as it could toward the reflection of the whole (Scruton, 1982; Copleston, 1985). Each monad was "a perpetual living mirror of the universe" (Leibniz, quoted in Abrams, 1958: 202), and a reflection of a pre-existing harmony that was already completely formed in the mind of God. Although their ultimate end

was predetermined, Leibniz nevertheless proposed a pluralism inherent in monads; they were endlessly developing from within, continually 'becoming' and changing their inner state (Barnard, 1965). But because this internal development could not be altered (for it too was prearranged by God) monads could never have any contact with each other, as Leibniz stated, "they have no openings (windows) through which anything could either enter or depart" (Leibniz, quoted in Barnard, 1965: 11).

From Leibniz' rationalist perspective, the lack of interaction between monads made any changes in perception due to an internal principle; reason alone was made responsible for both perception and reflection. All ideas were latently present in the mind and they mostly *remained* in the subconscious as 'petite perceptions' until, in some monads (including some human beings, sometimes) they became clear enough to emerge into consciousness through memory or feeling, this he referred to as 'apperception' or reflection (Copleston, 1985: 295-319). Herder, in contrast, provided an empirical, historical and *linguistic* account of the movement of ideas from the subconscious to the consciously reflective mind. He understood moments of 'apperception' as demonstrations of *Kraft*, the internal activity of the perceiving mind in interaction with external experience, not of the mind in interaction with itself as Leibniz had suggested. As Barnard notes, for Herder, "...consciousness, that is to say, is not innate, but rather a function of *development*. It is the result of the peculiar manner in which the growing self receives, and reacts to, the *stimuli* of its environment (Barnard, 1965: 43, original italics). Crucial to Herder's understanding of this process was the necessary role that language played as the external medium of consciousness. For Herder,

'apperception' came about through consciously isolating one quality in the wave of sense impressions which struck the mind as a 'distinguishing quality,'

Thus man exhibits reflection not only by recognising clearly or distinctly the qualities of objects that are before his mind, but also by realising the characteristics that distinguish one from another. This first act of apperception renders a clear concept: it is the first judgement of the mind (Herder, 1770: 135).

For Herder, language, thought and meaning thus arose simultaneously as manifestations of the same mental energy, *Kraft*. The essence of language was not the creation of external sounds, but the "internal genesis" of word symbols (Herder, 1770: 140)—this was for Herder the essential characteristic of language, its function as the 'dictionary of the soul.'

Furthermore, while Leibniz had suggested that organisms were virtually unaffected and therefore unalterable by any external influence, Herder rejected this rationalist conclusion. Herder interpreted the pluralism and multiplicity inherent in each individual organism as necessarily interactive. Thought, language and meaning, were by their very nature oriented towards an 'other,'

...the first human thought prepares communication with other beings; whatever I grasp directly assumes the form of both an identifying symbol for myself and a communicating symbol for others (Herder, 1770: 141).

So at the same time that Herder celebrated the creative and unique manifestations of *Kraft* in each individual or culture, he viewed individuals and cultures as naturally tending toward and desirous of an inter-connectedness with one another and with nature.

This tendency towards inter-connectedness, moreover, brought with it the possibility of individual and cultural *transformation*. For Herder *Kraft* was simultaneously guided by a principle of active growth and of change—change that was organised from within the mind but always in conjunction with the natural world. Herder's notion of organic growth and transformation thus assumed an ever emergent and *mutable* subject; it was modelled on the biological principle of palingenesis, of death and rebirth, of regeneration and resurrection,

One activity is increased by another; builds upon, or evolves from, the foregoing...Such a chain runs through the life of man until death. We are always growing out of childhood, however old we may be, are always in motion, restless, and dissatisfied. The essence of life is never fruition, but continuous becoming, and we have never been men until we have lived our life to the end... (Herder, quoted in Barnard, 1969: 28).

But while Herder's individuals and cultures were governed by principles of development immanent to them, "Is the whole tree not already contained in the seed?," as he expressed it, at the same time he perceived a commonality, a unity in the individuality and diversity of humankind. For Herder, *Kraft* was a *unifying* as well as an organising and transformative principle; there was, he believed, an underlying harmony in all languages, cultures and, indeed, individual souls—all were perceived as involved in a continual cycle of moving towards perfection, dying and experiencing rebirth. Herder's harmony, however, was not pre-existing in the sense that Leibniz understood it. Like Hamann, Herder viewed God as ultimately independent of *human* history. This meant that human development always remained open-ended (Morton, 1989) simultaneously determined by and determining of a given historical and geographical setting

(Barnard, 1965). Like Leibniz' monads, each individual and each culture developed toward the reflection of a whole, but as Barnard points out, Herder's 'souls' had windows, they sought a unity in communication with one another whilst retaining their diversity at the same time. Herder's unity was therefore a unity in diversity, a totality of ever evolving cultural fragments and historical particulars, and just as the individual was never fully formed, but endlessly becoming, so it was with the history of cultures and, indeed, language itself.

Despite Herder's stress on *unity* in diversity, however, his belief that human languages and cultures were always 'locally grown,' i. e., they developed in a particular time and a particular place out of particular 'environmental' conditions, makes him one of the earliest thinkers to advance a notion of linguistic and cultural relativism, suggesting an incongruity in his thinking. He wrote, for example, in *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*,

Of a thing that lies without the sphere of our perception we know nothing: the story of a king of Siam who considered ice and snow as non-entities, is in a thousand instances applicable to every man. The ideas of every indigenous nation are thus confined to its own region: if it profess to understand words expressing things utterly foreign to it, we have reason to remain long in doubt of the reality of the understanding (Herder, 1784-91: 194).

The apparent "paradoxical thesis" of unity in diversity has been recently linked explicitly to Herder and criticised for being both contradictory and socially irresponsible by Robert Young,

Herder, therefore, speaks with forked tongue: offering on the one hand rootedness, the organic unity of a people and their local, traditional culture, but also on the other hand the cultural education of the human race whereby the

achievements of one culture are grafted onto another...(Young, 1995: 42).

Young claims that although Herder claimed to recognise cultural expansion, by venerating the local and the traditional, he established a notion of relativism that appeared to support liberalism and fascism alike. Young maintains that Herder's notion of unity in diversity is therefore weak and even politically suspect.

It is the case that Herder's notion of 'unity in diversity' contains a dynamic tension that on the one hand appears to encourage a politically malleable form of cultural relativism; however, a closer examination of Herder's ideas challenges such a reading. For while Herder does not attempt to actually resolve the paradoxes he sets up, he does attempt, as Morton suggests, to "prevent[s] the paradox from lapsing into contradiction" (Morton, 1982: 53). When understood in relation to his philosophy of language, to his understanding of the relationship between language, culture and thought, and to his notion of *Kraft*, Herder's attempts to reconcile the particular and the universal can be seen directly to address the paradoxical nature of the incommensurability/relativism thesis.

Herder's idea of 'unity in diversity' is particularly relevant to the language and culture debates discussed in previous chapters, in relation to what emerged within these debates as the seemingly unresolvable paradox between a belief in cultural conservation, on the one hand, and cultural interpenetration, on the other. The difficulty in holding these two views constant influenced (and continues to influence) the shape of the culture and language debates and the positioning of participants within them. For example, with regard to

notions of working class culture, it became mutually advantageous for radicals and conservatives to support a view of cultural conservation, creating clear contradictions for radical educators whose aim was social liberation (see pp. 83-85). Similarly, Leavis' commitment to cultural tradition was negatively interpreted as *solely* a commitment to conservation, although the idea of interpenetration was intrinsic to his understanding of the function of a literary tradition.

As described above, for Herder, individuals and cultures were constantly developing in interaction with others, they were therefore not eternally imprisoned within their languages or their cultures. At the same time that Herder emphasised the historical and linguistic character of 'world views,' he simultaneously acknowledged the existence of standards of mutuality amongst divergent linguistic and cultural groups which would in the end lead to *Humanitat*, the ultimate recognition of unity in diversity. Although Herder did believe it to be undesirable and 'unnatural' for people to be forcibly uprooted from their 'native environments,' he did not assume that cultures or individuals were incapable of interaction, extension or growth.⁵

⁵ Many of Herder's interpreters have overlooked or undervalued his understanding of humankind as an inter-relational whole and some have accused him of taking a separatist, nationalist line which supported fascist and racist attitudes (see Collingwood, 1946: 88-93; Young, 1995: 36-43). These critics are led to this conclusion because of Herder's acceptance of the diverse origins of human experiences, or polygenesis, and its association with extremism and racism. Critics miss the fact that Herder understood the concept of polygenesis in association with palingenesis, the recurrence of historical events over time (see Fink, 1982). His observance of the natural historical occurrence of cultural mixing, for example, actually led him to reject the category of race, as he expressed it, ...In short there are neither four or five races, nor exclusive varieties on this Earth. Complexions run into each other: forms follow the genetic character: and upon the whole, are all at last but shades of the same great picture extending through all ages, and over all parts of the Earth. They belong not, therefore, so properly to systematic natural history, as to the physico-geographical history of man (Herder, 1784-91: 166). Herder's appeal to the idea of the incommensurability of cultures was in order to denounce the Enlightenment

For Herder, *Humanitat* represented ultimate human freedom and justice (Knoll, 1982); the same qualities that were vital for the activity of continual becoming. *Humanitat* was not achieved through the progressive unfolding of humankind toward some ultimate truth, but through the interwoven histories of individual nations and cultures. Cultural and linguistic traditions were not simply the reflection of a fixed set of accumulated practices or beliefs, they were the outcome of a continuous 'living dialogue,' a continuous process of becoming which, like the human organism, by its very nature merged the new with the old and the old with the new. As he stated in *On Diligence in the Study of Several Learned Languages*,

As long as we keep our native language on our tongue, we will penetrate so much more deeply the distinctiveness of each language. Here we will find gaps, there superfluity;—here riches, there a desert; and we will be able to enrich the poverty of the one with the treasures of the other (Herder, 1764: 33).

The themes of interaction, transformation and continuous becoming that appear repeatedly in his writings suggest that all individuals and cultures are always only partially formed; moreover, their existence is always simultaneously influencing and being influenced by a particular historical moment. Herder's idea of history as *transformation through interpenetration* is crucial to the understanding of culture and of the relationship between thought and language presented here. The notion of 'interpenetration' must, however, be distinguished from the current organic metaphor of

notion of the progressive perfectibility of man through history. It must be seen as part of his reaction to the 18th century autocratic state that scattered, exiled and alienated its citizens from their homelands and from themselves.

'hybridity' (see Hall, 1992; Bhabha, 1994). It is not concerned with the identification of *new* cultural crossbreeds as such; rather it indicates the activities of evolution and synthesis brought about through particular *existing* world views structured in and by language. The fact that cultural evolution already implies cultural mixing means that to contrast cultural *hybridity* with cultural *homogeneity* is to make an unnecessary and, indeed, erroneous distinction. The notion of interpenetration introduced here acknowledges, as Herder did, that cultures, like humans and other biological organisms, are always evolving even when they appear to be standing still.

Cultural transmission was, moreover, not merely a *reproductive* event for Herder, although this played an important role in the development of national identities. It necessarily involved continual evaluation (Barnard, 1969) in the form of an intra-cultural and/or inter-cultural 'dialectic.' Cultural and linguistic conservation and interpenetration are inextricably linked through the act of evaluation, understood as a part of the constitutive activity of the mind which contributes both to an individual's self-creation and self-expansion. As Herder wrote,

The mind nobly expands, when it is able to emerge from the narrow circle which climate and education have drawn around it, and learns from other nations at least what may be dispensed with by man. How much, that we have been accustomed to consider as absolutely necessary, do we find others live without, and consequently perceive to be by no means indispensable! Numberless ideas, which we have often admitted as the most general principles of the human understanding, disappear, in this place and that, with the climate, as the land vanishes like a mist from the eye of the navigator. What one nation holds indispensable to the circle of its thoughts, has never entered into the mind of a second, and by a third has been deemed injurious. Thus we wander over the Earth in a labyrinth of human fancies: but the question is: where is the central point of the labyrinth; to which all our

wanderings may be traced, as refracted rays to the Sun?
(Herder, 1784-91: 201).

While Herder does not say so himself in the above passage, it is deducible from his ideas that the central point of the labyrinth is language itself; it is the means to reconcile the tension between maintaining an individual cultural perspective while endeavouring to "incorporate and even combine with others." Language simultaneously structures meaning and carries the potential to transform meanings; it is the medium whereby both diversity and unity are realised. Different languages and cultures are an outward sign of different experiences shaped by local features of the environment—and consciousness is a function of the interaction of reason/language with a given experience. But the fact that individuals perceive the world from a particular cultural and linguistic perspective, does not imply the impossibility of achieving unity. It simply implies that any unity will always be partial and impermanent and that it will not be a unity of 'perfect parts' but a unity of particulars always *capable* of being united, at times in harmony and other times in struggle. Herder held, as Leibniz had done, that it was possible for the whole to appear differently for each individual and still be a whole. Herder's unity was thus not perceived as the sum total of the *necessarily* continuous and coherent parts of an objective world. Different languages and cultures do not combine to form the 'cognitive totality' of any knowable 'world.' Theirs is a unity comprised of fragments of knowledge of an ultimately unknowable world. Alexander Nehamas, in his study of Nietzsche, suggests a similar view (without reference to Herder) of what he refers to as Nietzsche's 'perspectivism,'

Perspectival approaches to the world are...not disjoint from one another. Each approach is capable of correcting itself, and many can incorporate new material and even combine with others to form broader systems of practices and inquiries. What is not possible is that at some point we can incorporate "all" the material there is into a single approach or that we can occupy "every" possible point of view (Nehamas, 1985: 51).

Nehamas' account of perspectivism captures the reading of Herder's diversity in unity suggested here. Rather than proposing a variety of distinct and incommensurable cultures which, like Leibniz's monads, are 'windowless' in relation to one another and thus incapable of reinterpreting or re-evaluating themselves through others, perspectival approaches to the world assume, as Herder did, that cultures and languages are *conjoined* in history,

What is true of one people, holds equally true with regard to the connexion of several together: they are joined as time and place unites them; they act upon one another, as the combination of active powers directs (Herder, 1784-91: 393).

This suggests their potentiality, at least, to intersect, overlap and have an effect on one another. However, it does not suggest an image of collections of fragmented or decentered individuals or cultures. It assumes cultured and centred selves who, while linguistically, culturally and historically constituted, have the potential to explore and expand the boundaries of this constitution; a process of identity expansion, involving both cultural conservation and interpenetration.

There is no doubt; thought, free from the bonds of speech, would appear to us as more pure and more of a whole. W. von Humboldt

The paradox with regard to cultural relativism which, as argued above, Herder's notion of unity in diversity begins to resolve, was also present in the language and culture debates with respect to linguistic relativity. As previously stated, a major issue in 20th century educational debates was whether languages from differing class cultures varied with respect to patterns of meanings and, if so, were incommensurable. The idea that individuals were 'products' of the patterns of meanings actualised in their languages was either used or refused, depending on the frequently overlapping political or pedagogical purposes for which such claims were made. The prevailing tendency, paradoxically proposed by both advocates of change *and* of the status quo, was to accept the 'facts' of linguistic relativity *and* incommensurability. This led both radical and conservative educators to discourage 'cross-cultural' dialogue between speakers or between speakers and texts, promoting instead the creation of texts by individual pupils or choosing texts from within an individual's relevant 'cultural' milieu. It has been argued thus far that this solution remained incomplete for, despite its value to pupils whose personal experiences had remained outside of their educational ones, it stressed diversity *without* unity with respect to the question of incommensurability. That is, the 'expressivist' strand that predominated in English education due to the influences of Britton and Rosen can be traced to Herder's relativism and romanticism (see Taylor, 1975: 13-29 for an account of Herder's contribution to expressivism), but without the benefit of his universalism.

The issue of incommensurability as it appeared implicitly in Bernstein's approach to language and thought, however, is traceable to the work of Wilhelm von Humboldt who developed many of Herder's ideas about language into the nineteenth century. In Bernstein's work, Herder's paradox reappeared, but instead of collapsing within relativist or romanticist solutions, in Bernstein the paradox became formalised, thereby maintaining its paradoxical nature. The formalisation of the paradox in Bernstein's work, while it occurred in part as a consequence of the particular social/political conditions surrounding its uptake in the educational debates must, however, also be seen as arising from the particular development of Herder's ideas by von Humboldt whose influence over modern linguistics and sociolinguistics (including Bernstein) historically had a greater impact than Herder's.

Von Humboldt reasserted Herder's belief in the inter-relationship between sense impressions, mental activity and the emergent sounds of a language, and of the relationship between language, culture and thought. Von Humboldt, however, developed these ideas in distinctive ways, particularly with regard to the question of linguistic relativity. He reasserted Herder's organic model of language, stressing language as an activity, or *energeia*, and not a dead product, or *ergon*. Herder had expressed a similar idea with his use of the concept of *Kraft*, the mental activity which allowed for the organisation, transformation and unification of sense impressions and ideas. But while for Herder, this activity suggested the possibility of continual becoming, von Humboldt saw this activity as having two separate stages, the first in which language organised itself according to its own internal dynamic, and the second in which the structure of a language took a final shape (Brown, 1967; Aarsleff, 1988), at which

point an individual's or culture's mental activity became contained by the constraints of its co-ordinates. Unlike Hamann and Herder who were primarily interested in how a language's *word formations* and *sounds* symbolised a nation's spirit, von Humboldt emphasised the relationship between the formation of this spirit and the *grammatical structure* of a language. Von Humboldt thus shifted the focus from the play of words within a language, to language as a completely organised structure within which the 'plays of thought' occurred. While for Hamann and Herder, a grammar was an entirely artificial product, the imposition of a system on what was for them the natural outcome of the flow of passions and sense experience, for von Humboldt, a grammar provided the necessary structural blueprint of a language (Mueller-Volmer, 1990); it was the key to a nation's underlying spirit,

This partly *fixed* and partly *fluid* content of language engenders a special relationship between it and the *speaking generation*. There is generated a stock of words and a system of rules whereby it grows, in the course of millennia, into an independent force...the thought once embodied in the language becomes an object for the soul, and to that extent exerts thereon an effect that is alien to it...the two opposing views here stated, that language belongs to or is foreign to the soul, depends or does not depend on it, are in actuality combined there and constitute the peculiarity of its nature...nowhere, not even in writing, does it have a permanent abode; its 'dead' part must always be regenerated in thinking, come to life in speech and understanding...but this act of regeneration consists, precisely in likewise making an object of it; it thereby undergoes on each occasion the full impact of the individual, but this impact is already governed by what language is doing and has done (von Humboldt, 1836: 62, original italics).

In highlighting language's paradoxical nature, von Humboldt raised the question of the possibilities for, in his words, the "power of the individual" to exert his or her freedom over "the might of language." Hamann and Herder had, like von Humboldt, understood

that language constructed the 'world-view' of its native speakers, as Hamann had said, "without a word, no reason—no world." However, they viewed this relationship as more phenomenological in kind; they emphasised the interpretive, dialogic nature of the formation and exchange of cultural meanings, emphatically rejecting any suggestion of language as similar to Kant's categories of the mind. Moreover, their understanding of language as structuring experience contained relativist assumptions, although as argued above, this was coupled, particularly in Herder, with a simultaneous belief in the universalist means toward an open and interconnected perspectivalist end.

Von Humboldt, on the other hand, viewed the structuring of language over experience more in Kantian terms, making language similar to a Kantian *a priori* category of the mind. For von Humboldt, it was the particular grammatical structure, operating like a Kantian category, which once established in any one language, constrained the possibilities of thought for the speakers of that language. And just as Kant had presumed his categories to be innate, von Humboldt suggested the existence of an innate power of "human linguisticity," which revealed itself in the semiotic system of a given language.⁶ But von Humboldt went even further to suggest the possibility of an ideal language in which this inner mental activity combined most appropriately with an outer sound form to represent the phenomenal world; he believed that this process of synthesis was achieved in its most perfect state when the inner power matched the outer form (Mueller-Volmer, 1990). Von Humboldt's belief, informed by Kant,

⁶ Humboldt's inner form of language, that "constant and unvarying factor that underlies and gave life and significance to each particular new linguistic act," was taken up by Chomsky and developed into the notion of a fixed generative rule (see Chomsky, 1964: 56-61).

that language mediated the subject and the objective world led him to compare grammatical systems and to conclude that some languages mediated this relationship better than others, and that it was these languages that best allowed the human mind to develop 'richer and loftier' ideas,

But mental activity does not simply aim at its own internal *enhancement*. In following this path it is also necessarily driven outward to erect a scientific edifice in the form of a *world-view*, and again to work creatively from this standpoint. This too we have taken into consideration, and it has unmistakably emerged that such an enlargement of man's outlook prospers best, or rather solely, under the guidance of the *most perfect linguistic form* (von Humboldt, 1836: 216, original italics).

Von Humboldt's belief in a perfect linguistic form was an outcome of his perception that all of the languages of the world fit to form the totality of the objective world. Like Leibniz, Kant or Herder, though each in their different ways, von Humboldt sought to 'reunite' the diversity in humankind with its universal nature (Cassirer, 1955: 155-163). However, in attempting to describe universal harmony through linguisticity, von Humboldt's 'human linguisticity' diverged from Herder's 'diversity in unity' in two crucial ways. First, as noted above, he 'de-relativised' the mental dispositions of different nations and/or linguistic groups, and second, he reinstated Leibniz' monads, as symbolised in languages, as *windowless*. For like Leibniz' monads, von Humboldt's languages were pluralistic within themselves but not in relation to other distinctive language groups. Thus, although for von Humboldt, linguisticity was a universal, innate capacity, he believed that individual language groups developed exclusively and independently of one another, each one according to

the mental capacities of its speakers and the system of rules which these generated,

The proper evolution of language is in natural accord with that of the *intellectual capacity* as such. For since the need to think awakens language in man, the successful advance of thought must also necessarily call for what emanates purely from the concept of language. Yet were even a nation endowed with such a language to lapse, for some reason, into mental torpor and weakness, it would always be able to extricate itself more easily from this state by means of its language (von Humboldt, 1836: 144, original italics).

Von Humboldt did recognise the fact of cultural interpenetration, but he believed that no matter how great the influence of another culture or civilisation on a particular nation, that nation's *language* would never be able to change its original quality. Thus any expansion or transformation of a nation's mental activity from *without* would have to be mediated by something other than language. Von Humboldt thus raised the question of the possibility of new meanings being generated or discovered from *outside* of language itself, although he appears to have viewed this primarily as a compensatory act for languages incapable of extricating themselves from within,

Conversely, the intellectual capacity must find means for advancement from its own resources, if accompanied by a language that deviates from this correct and natural line of development. Through its self-created means it will then react upon the language, not indeed creatively, since such creations can only be the work of the language's own vital impulse, but by building itself into the language, lending a meaning and allowing an application to the form of the latter, which that tongue itself had not imparted and to which it had not been led (von Humboldt, 1836: 144).

Von Humboldt's interpretation of the idea of an inseparable connection between a nation's language and its mental capacity

introduced a contrast that had not existed in Herder's or Hamann's understanding of language between *purely regular* forms and *deviant* forms, for von Humboldt assumed an ideal grammatical system that would approximate most the objective world and correspond to the highest and clearest of thinking. This difference in their thinking was a crucial one, for it revealed the distinctive philosophical bases that underlie their beliefs about the relationship between culture, language and thought. Moreover, this difference also suggests an heretofore unrecognised intellectual point of origin for the conflicting interpretations of this relationship that emerged in the language and culture debates. For although the conflicts that were present in the debates over the English curriculum are generally perceived as warring educational and socio-political discourses, they must also be interpreted as the persistence of debate over the same philosophical issues that motivated Hamann, Herder and von Humboldt in the 18th century which have been described above. This recognition of the relevant philosophical origins of the educational debates will serve in the final chapter as a useful point of reference to re-address the seemingly intractable contradictions and polarities of positionings that appear and continue to appear when the issues of language, culture and identity become the focus of attention.

Chapter Seven
The key to the labyrinth:
the language and culture debates revisited

The paradox lost in the politics of culture

This thesis has argued that the conceptual themes with respect to language, culture and social class that comprised the intellectual field of English education in the 1960s and 1970s, encouraged educators to downplay the mobility, variation and flexibility found within and between cultures and languages and/or to interpret these primarily through theories of pluralism or resistance. Radical educators tended to emphasise working class culture and language as representations of distinctive and uniform 'ways of life' that were under threat (see pp. 85-87). This tendency to treat working class culture as an 'endangered' species, however, was perhaps a forlorn attempt to preserve from without what, in any case, could only be preserved from within. It overlooked the fact that working class culture (like all cultures) was a continually evolving culture that was both shaped by and shaping the social and cultural landscape of post-war Britain. One of the consequences of such 'strategic essentialism' (see Rattansi, 1994: 74-77; Fusco, 1995: 27) in response to a legitimate fear that post-war reforms would leave many working and lower middle class pupils still without a voice, was the elision of the idea that many of these pupils might forge 'multi'-identities in the context of a more democratic and pluralist educational system.

That this was at least possible in post-war Britain had already been suggested by the movement from within the working and lower middle classes that occurred in the 1950s, exemplified by the 'new

literary elite' identified in Chapter Three and their readership. Although the aims of these writers differed—some of them used their vantage point or position for personal social mobility, others to voice their opposition to bourgeois culture, and still others to build bridges between cultures—all were engaged in an interactive and evaluative activity, in this case, literary production and dissemination, that contributed to the social and cultural transformation of post-war society. These writers were all engaged in the type of internally- and externally-directed cultural confrontations that, where they are free to occur in multicultural societies, can and do contribute to changes in existing patterns of relationships and understandings between individuals and cultures, as Habermas suggests,

In multicultural societies the coexistence of forms of life with equal rights means ensuring every citizen the opportunity to grow up within the world of a cultural heritage and to have his or her children grow up in it without suffering discrimination because of it. It means the opportunity to confront this and every other culture and to perpetuate it in its conventional form or transform it; as well as the opportunity to turn away from its commands with indifference or break with it self-critically and then live spurred on by having made a conscious break with tradition, or even with divided identity (Habermas, 1994: 131-132).

Within the educational system, however, despite the emphasis on class culture, pupils were actually treated as individuals who were free from the constraints of community. As argued at length in Chapter Four, the desire to empower working class pupils in the pedagogic context meant that pupils' subjectivities had to be deemed free of any social or cultural constraints on cognition. The various interpretations of linguistic relativity theories that gained purchase in educational contexts were used to argue that all languages were

cognitively equivalent. The idea of cultural constraints upon language and/or cognition, caught up in the politically-charged deficit/difference debates, was deemed unacceptable to those eager to maintain an image of the pupil as the sole creator of meaning. For this reason, Bernstein's approach to language and subjectivity was rejected, for it suggested that just as pupils spoke a language/culture so language/culture also 'spoke' pupils. The idea that the 'voice' of a child was deeply embedded in a cultural tradition that was simultaneously creative *and* constraining was not readily acknowledged.

And yet, despite the belief held by educators in the individuality/universality of meaning and its implication—the potential for pupils to overcome their diversity and establish a unity with other cultural meanings—the implicit assumption was that pupils from different social class backgrounds could have no basis for agreement over the meanings of texts. Without sufficient insight into the relationship between language, culture and cognition of the type that Herder provides and the seeds of which were present in different forms in both Leavis and Bernstein, English educators were not able to associate pupils' creative, cognitive powers with the activity of communicating through their cultural/class locations in dialogue with texts (and other readers) to explore divergent, complex organisations of meaning and form. The version of the incommensurability argument that silently informed the educational debates assumed the impossibility and/or undesirability of critical reflection and evaluation of cultures and cultural forms other than (and even including) an individual's own. This was one of the main motivations behind the avoidance of high cultural texts and literary criticism for working class and lower middle class pupils in particular.

Incommensurability and aesthetic experience

The outcome of the notion of incommensurability that informed educational debates was that the baby of critical reflection was thrown out with the bath water of traditional literary criticism. Neither the hermeneutic nor the emancipatory element of the aesthetic function of literature/language was considered relevant in the struggles over legitimacy where competing values and traditions were concerned. In turning texts, including literary works, into material for the type of social realist approaches to literature described in Chapter Four, educators, located in a political field in which leftist ideas were in the ascendant, downplayed the critical, interpretative approach to the analysis of texts. A critical hermeneutic approach to texts became outflanked by an ultimately Marxist view of aesthetics/culture which relegated these to the superstructural domain, outside of the forces of production and therefore related only indirectly to the issue of liberation. Shierry Weber has commented on Marxists' relationship to aesthetics in general,

When Marx in his historical materialism reformulated the problem of liberation in terms of social conflict and the social organisation of the means of production, the role of reason and consciousness in attaining freedom became even more ambiguous and the aesthetic came to be seen as a derivative phenomenon without a major role in the struggle for liberation (Weber, 1977: 80).

But if the particular variety of Marxism that dominated the British left viewed aesthetics as a derivative phenomenon, other Marxist approaches have provided an alternative view of aesthetic experience, while keeping liberation as their aim. Adorno, for example, although aware that the aesthetic could be caught up in

existing conditions of oppression, as in a work of high culture which reinforced the preservation of traditional class divisions, nevertheless believed that the *aesthetic experience also contained a moment of transcendence over existing conditions* by expressing the idea of harmony 'negatively,' thereby contributing to a critique of the status quo. He and other members of the Frankfurt School claimed the potential radical function of aesthetics in a class society, exploring the dialectical relationship between such traditional dichotomies as subject and object, reason and nature, the individual and the universal (Weber, 1977). This potential, however, was not substantially explored by radical educators who, by and large, continued to view aesthetics, and its elaboration in literary criticism, as a bourgeois, liberal and non-liberatory practice.

An alternative understanding of the relationship between aesthetic phenomena, historical conditions and liberation is also found in Herder, who extended aesthetics into the process of language acquisition and cognition, on the one hand, and into the processes of social history on the other (Frank, 1988). Herder stressed the function of literary works to interpret a nation's sensibility; a nation's poets played with words, expressions and their structures, making them capable of arousing the senses, reuniting form and content. Likewise, he saw literary works from other cultures as the key to penetrate their spirit, translating them into the reader's own, striving towards a unity of meaning in diversity. But for Herder the act of translation was not principally meant to expropriate meanings from another culture, it was to serve positively as a means toward strengthening an individual's own cultural/self-realisation (see pp. 176-178). Moreover, for Herder, cultural meanings were never merely reproduced, whether inter-

culturally or intra-culturally, they were always historically constituted and constituting. Thus literary texts from the past could serve as a site for self-reflection and evaluation for modern readers, as for example with modern interpretations of mythological tales,

Let the ancient images and stories be applied to more recent events. One informs them with a new poetic sense, changes them here and there in order to achieve a new purpose; as master of the house and owner, one composes and separates, goes forward and turns aside, steps back or stands still, to make use of everything only as household goods, to satisfy ones needs, comfort and adornment, as one sees fit as it fits the fashion of the day (Herder, 1767b: 229).

The Czech aesthetician, Jan Mukarovsky, who like Herder, understood art as a social fact, subject to innovation and change rather than a function of timeless laws or universals, echoes Herder's understanding of the reader-text relationship in the following passage,

About the novel which has absorbed the reader there have accumulated not one but many realities. The deeper the work has absorbed the reader, the greater is the area of current and vitally important realities of the reader to which the work attaches a material relationship. The change which the material relationship of the work—the sign—has undergone is thus simultaneously its weakening and its strengthening. It is weakened in the sense that the work does not refer to the reality which it directly depicts, and strengthened in that the work of art as a sign acquires an indirect (figurative) tie with realities which are vitally important to the entire universe of the perceiver as a collection of values. Thus the work of art acquires the ability to refer to a reality which is totally different from the one which it depicts, and to systems of values other than the one from which it arose and on which it is founded (Mukarovsky, [1936] 1970: 75).

Both Mukarovsky and Herder suggest that aesthetic experience and self-reflection should be viewed as concurrent activities. Like Herder's interpretation of Leibniz' monadology, the relationship between the reader and text is perceived as reciprocal and reflective, in

which access to meanings, shared or otherwise, results from the interaction itself. More recently, Richard Rorty has expressed the view that literature is the easiest means to enter into other cultural worlds (Rorty, 1989). He sees literature and the practice of literary criticism as a means for human beings to resolve moral contradictions—both within themselves and between themselves and other cultures—and, in the process, gain a developing self-awareness of their own socialisation. The dialectical relationship that obtains between readers and texts, Rorty defines as the attempt to play ‘final vocabularies’ against one another,

...nothing can serve as a criticism of a final vocabulary save another final vocabulary; there is no answer to a redescription save a re-re-description. Since there is nothing beyond vocabularies which serve as a criterion of choice between them, criticism is a matter of looking on this picture and on that, not of comparing both pictures with the original. Nothing can serve as criticism of a person save another person, or of a culture save an alternative culture—for persons and cultures are, for us, incarnated vocabularies. So our doubts about our own characters or our own culture can be resolved or assuaged only by enlarging our acquaintance. The easiest way of doing that is to read books... (Rorty, 1989: 80).

In each of these accounts, political and philosophical differences aside, the aesthetic function, including norms and values, is treated as primarily social and historical, not moral and transcendental. And yet, although aesthetics is not viewed as functioning toward the revelation of universal moral truths, it *is* seen as aiming at some type of synthesis or unity wherein cognitive associations are made, conjoining different perspectives and contributing to sensual/intellectual evolution. In this view, cultural traditions as laid down in literature do not have a mere reproductive or reifying effect. Rather, they provide a means for

understanding more about ones own present, in dialogue with the past or with another culture.

In English education, however, the connection between literary criticism and cognition fatally left culture and history to one side. Although Britton clearly believed in the transformative potential of literature and language in relation to cognition, his focus on the individual downplayed how literature and language functioned culturally and historically. Radical educators, on the other hand, in rightfully challenging educational practices that excluded alternative voices and promoted the maintenance of the status quo, reduced the cultural and historical function of language and literature to their hegemonic and reproductive capacities. The politicisation of the notion of tradition led to its being viewed solely within the context of class conflict in which essentialised notions of culture obtained. Tradition thus came to be seen as a stagnant force that had either to be empowered or defeated rather than as an evolving totality of cultural fragments and historical particulars, represented in and through language, which served as an important discursive site for the generation, transmission and interpretation of meanings.

The idea of the aesthetic function as a linguistically-mediated activity suggests, however, that it does have an essential role to play in a language-based curriculum, as a source for the exploration of the relationship between meaning and form, on the one hand, and language, culture and cognition, on the other, as Habermas indicates,

If aesthetic experience is incorporated into the context of individual life-histories, if it is utilised to illuminate a situation and to throw light on individual life-problems—if it at all communicates its impulses to a collective life form—then art enters into a language game which is no longer that of aesthetic criticism, but belongs, rather, to everyday

communicative practice. It then no longer affects only our evaluative language or only renews the interpretation of needs that colour our perceptions; rather, it reaches into our cognitive interpretations and normative expectations and transforms the totality in which these moments are related to each other (Habermas, 1985: 202).

In the English classroom, however, the idea of aesthetic experience as a communicative practice that could serve as an important discursive means toward the critical interpretation of culture(s) was eclipsed, as educators' concentrated their efforts on proving the equal (cognitive) validity of pupils' (and texts') linguistic varieties. But just as these efforts to demonstrate the universality of meaning proved a double-edged sword, creating a theoretical gap between the culture and the child, the emphasis on hegemonic struggles over linguistic and educational rights likewise established a gap between pedagogic strategies oriented toward addressing material social/educational inequality, on the one hand, and the forms of communicative interaction that play a role in these strategies, on the other. In their attempts to address both the material and linguistic inequalities experienced by their working class pupils, educators *simultaneously endorsed the separation of the socio-political world from the cognitive one*. Consequently, the idea that language—in the form of dialogic conversation and critical reflection over texts or other communicative practices—was itself a medium for the transformation of meanings and forms of solidarity 'in the world' was, paradoxically, not incorporated into the language paradigm.

Language: the key to the labyrinth?

The issue of how or to what extent linguistically-mediated activities—whether literary critical ones or everyday communicative practices—can serve as the means for the generation, expansion and transformation of meanings both within the same culture and across diverse cultures is a fundamental one for educators, and of particular relevance to the debates within English education. As discussed in previous chapters, where culturally competing, contradictory or simply divergent language games were present, English educators tended to try to resolve questions of conflict and/or difference by appealing to relativistic arguments about language and culture, on the one hand, and to the universality of meaning, on the other. The relativist argument within English education was constructed around a belief in the incommensurability of cultures which ultimately led to the rejection of literary criticism as a discursive practice in multi-(class) cultural contexts and discouraged the development of an hermeneutic approach to textual analysis organised around a more democratic and pluralist exchange of meanings. The universalist argument was, following Chomsky, constructed around support for the universal aspects of language and cognition, in effect denying any relationship between culture and cognition. Support for universalism also appeared under a different guise and to different degrees in the claims made by Leavis and other, mainly conservative, literary and cultural critics to the ‘Truth’ contained in the ‘Great Tradition’. Although Leavis’ original call for a ‘point of view above classes’ was largely a reaction to the ubiquity of Marxist literary criticism in the 1930s, it was also an appeal to a universal human culture, similar to that found in Herder’s notion of *Humanität*.

In the previous chapter, it was argued that Herder's notion of 'unity in diversity' suggests a way towards reconciling some of the polarities and paradoxes that characterised the debates in English education. More recent philosophical debates centred around hermeneutics have also elaborated positions which, like Herder's, both challenge and extend the terms of the relativism/universalism dichotomy (Gadamer, 1975, Habermas, 1971, 1979, 1984; and see Rorty, 1980, 1982, 1989, 1991). These attempts to go "beyond objectivism and relativism," as Richard Bernstein has characterised them (Bernstein, 1991), while offering no ultimate solutions, suggest further ways of considering the role of language and culture in creating and constraining the possibility of change or exchange of meanings, particularly where multi-identities emerge and converge.

Critical theory, hermeneutics and the 'quest for commensurability'

The view posed by Hamann and developed by Herder and von Humboldt—of the inseparability of language and reason—serves as the starting point for the role of critical hermeneutics in English education considered here, in particular, the idea elaborated by Herder that language/reflection serves as both an identifying and a communicating symbolic activity. Herder suggested that language, by its very nature, tended toward inter-connectedness with others; it was inherently dialogic, constituted and constituting in human history. Cultural and linguistic traditions were, for Herder, the perpetual outcomes of this 'living dialogue.' Therefore, the idea that individuals or cultures could evolve or be transformed from within culturally and historically embedded 'world views' was in no way contradictory. Within this conceptualisation, the 'quest for commensurability,' or, as it has been

defined in this thesis, the search for an open, dialogic means to communicate across difference, is neither denied in the face of diversity nor does it rely on an appeal to cognitive universals. The reading of Herder offered here thus seems to suggest the theoretical possibility of escaping the communicative dead-end of relativism whilst maintaining the inevitability of cultural, historical and linguistic diversity. In the recent philosophical debates over hermeneutics cited above, however, some of this assumption, or aspects of it, are challenged on philosophical as well as political grounds. While no attempt can be made here to do justice to the full scope of these debates, they nevertheless provide valuable insights into the foci of this thesis: language, culture and the issue of commensurability.

Within these debates, the German philosopher, Hans Georg Gadamer, most approximates Herder's position by emphasising the non-contradictory relationship between history, tradition and critical reflection. Echoing both Hamann and Herder, he insists on the 'linguisticity of all understanding'—everything that is, according to Gadamer, reflects itself in the mirror of language,

The fact that it is in the midst of a linguistic world and through the mediation of an experience pre-formed by language that we grow up in our world, does not remove the possibilities of critique. On the contrary, the possibility of going beyond our conventions and beyond all those experiences that are schematised in advance, opens up before us once we find ourselves, in our conversation with others, faced with opposed thinkers, with new critical problems, with new experiences...In reality, we owe this to the linguistic virtuality of our reason and language does not, therefore, present an obstacle to reason (Gadamer, 1975: 495).

Like Herder, Gadamer views human consciousness as endlessly becoming, though subject to the effects of history and culture. This he describes as 'effective historical consciousness' (Gadamer, 1975: 267-274). According to Gadamer, the task of effective historical consciousness is the 'fusion of horizons,' his metaphor for the interpretive understanding that occurs between individuals and texts, as well as between individuals and cultures. Horizons, i. e., beliefs, values and practices, are constituted in the present through a process of distinguishing—"to acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it, but to see it better within a larger whole and in truer proportion" (Gadamer, 1975: 272). As Thomas McCarthy points out, "[Gadamer] is not saying that we ought to relate the meanings to be understood to our own situation, but that we cannot understand without doing so—this relation belongs to the very structure of *Verstehen* [understanding]" (McCarthy, 1978: 414 n. 39). For Gadamer, then, acts of interpretation and understanding are essentially the same (Mueller-Volmer, 1986: 37-43). Horizons serve as the means by which individuals locate themselves in a world, and simultaneously, they open individuals up to new worlds, representing the inter-connectedness of the past and present, one individual/culture and another,

Just as the individual is never simply an individual, because he is always involved with others, so too the closed horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction. The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never utterly bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion (Gadamer, 1975: 271).

The fusion of horizons that is accomplished throughout history, however, is always tied, according to Gadamer, to preconceptions and prejudgements. As historically situated, the 'linguisticity of all understanding' is always based on taken for granted prejudices and preconceptions. The task of effective historical consciousness is thus never ending, for its aim is not to uncover the correct interpretation, but to effect understanding across difference. This does not, however, imply the communicative/interpretive dead end of relativism. Gadamer maintains that the idea of prejudice as having only negative value, i. e., as working against critical reflection and understanding, is an unfortunate outcome of the modern enlightenment's creation of an unconditional antithesis between reason and tradition (Gadamer, 1975: 235-253). In opposition to this enlightenment belief, Gadamer argues for a view of prejudices as *conditions* of understanding. For it is in the interpretive process of understanding that individuals gradually come to self-conscious awareness of the fore-meanings and prejudices that constitute their 'world views' against the 'newness' of other views.

It is, thus, in the dialogical encounter itself, the hermeneutic moment of reflection, that unity in diversity is accomplished,

To reach an understanding with one's partner in a dialogue is not merely a matter of total self-expression and the successful assertion of one's own point of view, but a transformation into a communion, in which we do not remain what we were (Gadamer, 1975: 341).

A unity amongst diverse ideas is potentially revealed or achieved in the process of experience that emerges with "one's partner in a dialogue," including a text. And it is this unity of ideas which, according to Richard Bernstein, is Gadamer's notion of truth—"what

can be argumentatively validated by the community of interpreters who open themselves up to what tradition says to us" (Bernstein, 1991: 154).

Gadamer's hermeneutics suggests that while there is no escaping the effects of culture and history, this does not imply the impossibility of dialogue or of making comparative judgements oriented to a more open, future state of freedom. Nevertheless, he has been criticised for implying a blind subjugation to tradition and authority (Habermas, 1977; on the ongoing debate between Habermas and Gadamer see Misgeld, 1976; McCarthy, 1978: 162-193; Hekman, 1986; Bernstein, 1991) and for being a metaphysical idealist (Rorty, 1982: 139-159; Lyotard, 1984). As these particular criticisms touch upon important questions raised within the educational debates with respect to the relationship between tradition and hegemonic relations, on the one hand, and the idealistic as opposed to the socio-political aspects of traditional literary criticism and textual analysis, on the other, they will be considered below.

Habermas has criticised Gadamer for denying that the context of tradition—as the point of convergence of possible truths and real unity—serves at the same time as a site in which truths are systematically distorted (Habermas, 1977). According to Habermas, Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons' can only be considered legitimate if it has been worked out in the medium of a linguistic tradition unconstrained by such distortion. Habermas insists that,

...the dogmatism of the traditional context is the vehicle not only for the objectivity of language in general, but for the repressiveness of a power relationship which deforms the intersubjectivity of the understanding as such and systematically distorts colloquial communication (Habermas, 1986: 314).

Although Habermas and Gadamer are in essential agreement about the linguisticity of all understanding, Habermas contends that language must also be viewed as a medium of domination that serves to “legitimate relations of organised force,” and claims that “in so far as the legitimations do not articulate the relations of force that they make possible, in so far as these relations are expressed in the legitimations, language is *also* ideological (Habermas, 1977: 360). He criticises Gadamer, and the hermeneutic endeavour, for reducing social inquiry to the interpretation of meaning, of “sublimating social processes entirely to cultural tradition” (Habermas, 1977: 361 and see McCarthy, 1978: 183; Bernstein, 1985: 20-25). He insists that tradition, or what he refers to as the ‘lifeworld,’ be viewed as intrinsically related to other societal processes, or ‘systems,’ which are not manifested completely in language. Habermas thus argues for the linkage of the cultural and linguistic with the social, political and economic and in particular, their relationship to labour and relations of power,

Tradition *as a whole* can be assigned its place; it can be conceived in its relation to the systems of social labour and political domination. It thus becomes possible to grasp functions that the cultural tradition assumes within the system as a whole, functions that are not made explicit *as such* in tradition—i. e., ideological relations...(Habermas, quoted in McCarthy, 1978: 183-184).

At the same time that he maintains the inter-connectedness of systems and the lifeworld, however, Habermas distinguishes analytically between ‘systems rationalisation’ which is ‘purposive,’ i. e., oriented toward the organisation and efficiency of particular ends, and ‘lifeworld rationalisation’ which is ‘communicative,’ i. e.,

constructed around communicative action oriented toward reaching understanding (rationalisation in both cases refers to the development of the rationale, or internal logic, of a form of social action/coordination (Bernstein, 1985: 20; Cooke, 1994: 5)).

Habermas specifically sets out to address the problem faced by modern society when 'systems rationalisation' threatens the communicative integrity—the very means of internal coherence—of the lifeworld, leaving it in a fragmented, alienated and culturally differentiated state in which “the actions, practices and interpretations of its members have become increasingly detached from established normative contexts and increasingly reliant on action oriented toward understanding” (Cooke, 1994: 141). Importantly, however, unlike Weber or members of the Frankfurt School with whom he shares certain affinities, Habermas does not conclude that the total destruction of the lifeworld by purposive-instrumental reason is either inevitable or inescapable. Instead, he suggests that under threat from systems rationalisation, individual members of modern society develop and engage communicative reason all the more, seeking and learning new ways to reflexively realise their intersubjectivity in different degrees of solidarity,

The closer the proximity in which competing gods and demons have to live with each other in political communities, the more tolerance they demand, but they are not incompatible...To be sure, it is also characteristic of modernity that we have grown accustomed to living with dissent in the realm of questions that admit of “truth”; we simply put controversial claims to one side “for the time being.” Nonetheless, we perceive this pluralism of contradictory convictions as an incentive for learning processes; we live in the expectation of future resolutions (Habermas, 1985: 194).

But whereas Gadamer's belief in the possibility of fusion reflects his belief in the ontological precedence of linguistic tradition/convention (McCarthy, 1978), Habermas argues that, the "expectation of future resolutions" is presupposed in the "general structures of possible communication" and the "structures of social reproduction" themselves (Bernstein, 1991: 191), through "the gentle but obstinate, a never silent although seldom redeemed claim to reason" (Habermas, 1979: 97) that underlies all communicative action oriented toward understanding.

For Habermas, it is reason, not tradition, that allows individuals/cultures to transcend the authority and domination that he perceives are "inculcated as rules for interpreting the world and of action" in the grammars of language games (Habermas, 1977: 358). He maintains that "the supposition of a *common objective world* is built into the pragmatics of every single linguistic usage" (Habermas, 1992: 138, emphasis added). This, he suggests, is true even for speech situations in which reasons are not given or required—including within cultures/traditions which do not have practice at "distancing themselves from themselves." Drawing, in part, on Chomsky's theory of generative grammar, Habermas attempts to disclose the set of universal conditions presupposed in all communicative action. In contrast to Chomsky, however, who draws a distinction between linguistic competence and performance, and for whom generative grammar refers only to underlying competence (i. e., the ideal speaker-listener), Habermas claims that actual linguistic *performance*, what he refers to as 'communicative competence,' also contains a universal core (McCarthy, 1978: 274-275). This belief in universal formal features of communication serves as the basis for Habermas' universal pragmatics:

Only the formal anticipation of the idealised conversation as a future way of life guarantees the ultimate contrafactual standing agreement which united us provisionally, and on the basis of which any factual agreement, if it be a false one, can be criticised as a false consciousness (Habermas, 1986: 315).

For Habermas, every speech act anticipates or presupposes the argumentative procedure of providing and evaluating reasons in support of the universal validity claims: comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness and rightness. Furthermore, he maintains that certain forms of argumentation, or 'discourses,' are based on a number of "idealising presuppositions of communicating action," which are set down in the very structures of action oriented toward understanding, for example, that all participants are motivated by concern for the better argument, that no force except that of the better argument is used (Cooke, 1994: 30-31). As McCarthy explains,

The very act of participating in a discourse involves the supposition that genuine consensus is possible and that it can be distinguished from false consensus. In attempting to come to a rational decision about truth claims, we must suppose that the outcome of our discussion will be (or at least can be) the result simply of the force of the better argument and not of accidental or systematic constraints on communication. This absence of constraint—both external (such as force or threat of force) and internal (such as neurotic or ideological distortions)—can, Habermas argues, be characterised formally in terms of the pragmatic structure of communication. His thesis is that the structure is free from constraint only when for all participants there is a symmetrical distribution of chances to select and employ speech acts, when there is an effective equality of opportunity for the assumption of dialogue roles (McCarthy, 1978: 306).

Although Habermas acknowledges that his thesis is counterfactual—the fact is that undistorted dialogue rarely if ever occurs—he is nevertheless insistent that the *idea* of unconstrained

communication is an unavoidable supposition of discourse of participants in dialogue (Cooke, 1994: 30-31; McCarthy, 1978: 309). Moreover, and of particular relevance to the objectivism/relativism debate, Habermas also maintains that the presupposition of an idealising concept of truth or validity is what makes dialogue possible, especially across rival conceptions:

Even in the most difficult process of reaching understanding, all parties appeal to the common reference point of a possible consensus, even if this reference point is projected in each case from within their own contexts. For, although they may be interpreted in various ways and applied according to different criteria, concepts like truth, rationality, or justification play the same grammatical role in every linguistic community (Habermas, 1992: 138).

Habermas, however, also makes clear that his universal pragmatics does not suggest some extra-contextual or extra-linguistic standpoint from which individuals raise validity claims. He believes that whether a validity claim is capable of rational consensus can only be established dialogically in unconstrained communication. Thus, the development of a notion of truth, while dependent on a notion of an ideally free community, is ultimately established by consensus within and between actual communities. Thus, he states, "the validity claimed for propositions and norms transcends space and time, but in each actual case the claim is raised here and now, in a specific context, and accepted or rejected with real implications for social interaction" (Habermas, 1992: 139).

For Habermas, the proposition of universal pragmatic presuppositions of communication is intrinsically related to his fear that the 'colonisation of the life world' by purposive rationalisation has created modern societies where individuals have become

'communicatively' alienated from themselves and one another. For Habermas, this alienation and fragmentation carries with it both a potential emancipation, in the sense that individuals are freed from traditions that bind, and a loss of self, in that they can no longer rely on a shared sense of 'communitas.' For Habermas, the emancipatory potential can only be realised if individuals learn, discursively, to make the transition to greater universalism. For Habermas, this does not imply a loss of self or individuality, but an increase in the strength of diversity *in* unity,

For the transitory unity that comes about in the porous and refracted intersubjectivity of a linguistically mediated consensus not only supports, but furthers and accelerates the pluralisation of forms of life and the individualisation of life styles. More discourse means more contradiction and difference. The more abstract the agreements become, the more diverse the disagreements with which we can *nonviolently* live (Habermas, 1992: 140).

Habermas' universal pragmatics both displays affinities to and distinguishes him from Herder and Gadamer, and contributes to the exploration of the notion of unity in diversity undertaken in this thesis in several ways. Both Gadamer and Herder share Habermas' search for a common ground on which individuals and cultures recognise/realise their inherent intersubjectivity. Although Gadamer maintains that individuals cannot transcend 'the dialogue that they are,' and therefore refutes Habermas claim to a universal pragmatics, he nevertheless proposes a notion of historically agreed 'truths,' argumentatively validated and reformulated through the affirmation of traditional prejudice and reflection. And Herder, whilst emphasising the cultural-historical nature of cognitive/linguistic transformation, recognised an inherent unifying nature in the concept

of *Humanitat*. All three attempt to demonstrate the inter-connection between self-knowledge and knowledge of an-other whilst at the same time emphasising that the unity brought about in dialogic communication does not do away with difference (or the individual) but instead confirms it. Habermas, however, moves beyond both Gadamer and Herder by proposing a *context-transcendent* as well as a context-dependent account of this process. For Gadamer, in so doing, Habermas reasserts the Enlightenment's imposition of a false distinction between reason and tradition. Gadamer argues that because it is historically situated, reason must be understood as necessarily limited, partial and based on taken for granted prejudices and preconceptions. Communicative action cannot dissolve traditional prejudice by an appeal to universal validity or rationality—for Gadamer, like Herder, the central point of the 'labyrinth of human fancies' can be found in language and tradition alone.

Habermas' critique of Gadamer for failing to acknowledge the disturbance of modernity itself on tradition as a 'means to the truth,' is echoed in the critique of hermeneutic understanding by Richard Rorty and Jean-Francois Lyotard, but from a postmodernist perspective (see Lyotard, 1984; Rorty, 1982: 139-159). Their criticism of Gadamer (and hermeneutics in general) is for his wishing to guarantee that there is 'meaning to know.' Richard Rorty, for example, though elsewhere sympathetic to Gadamer (see Rorty, 1980: 357-364), criticises him for attempting to turn hermeneutics into a philosophical alternative to epistemology; for using hermeneutics as a method of criticism for getting at the core 'truth' of a text. He faults Gadamer for thinking that criticism (of a text) is discovery rather than creation,

[He] thinks that if he stays within the boundaries of a text, takes it apart, and shows how it works, then he will have escaped the "sovereignty of the signifier," broken with the myth of language as mirror of reality, and so on. But in fact he is just doing his best to imitate science—he wants a method of criticism, and he wants everybody to agree that he has cracked the code. He wants all the comforts of consensus...(Rorty, 1982: 152).

Rorty believes that any 'method' of criticism implies a 'privileged' vocabulary, "one which gets to the essence of the object, the one which expresses the properties which it has in itself as opposed to those which we read into it" (Rorty, 1982: 152). He argues that all vocabularies and all standards are merely a result of conventions and that, therefore, no one can be privileged—all vocabularies, he suggests, are as mortal as men (Rorty, 1982: 153).

But Gadamer's position, like Herder's, is that at any given time, any vocabulary, embedded within a tradition can be said to be 'privileged,' not in a metaphysical sense, but simply in that it is shared by a community of users (Hekman, 1986: 165). For Gadamer individuals *belong* to traditions, histories and languages; it is only in attempting to understand themselves in dialogue with other 'mortal men' that they become reflexively aware of their contingency—then their vocabulary ceases to be 'privileged' in the original way.⁷

⁷ Elsewhere Rorty admits that, in practice, individuals must 'privilege' the interpretive horizon of their own linguistic communities, that they must "grasp the ethnocentric horn" in the face of pretending an endless tolerance of all others, "even though there can be no noncircular justification for doing so" (Rorty, 1991: 29). Here Rorty appears to treat ethnocentrism in much the same way Gadamer does the notion of prejudice. He attempts to rehabilitate it from its strictly negative sense and allow it to mean simply the beliefs proposed by one culture that must be tested by trying to weave them together with the beliefs of another.

The Language and Culture Debates: a Retrospect

The period in English education in the 1960s and 1970s has been presented in this thesis as one which saw the emergence of a number of contradictory political and intellectual positions with respect to language and culture. It has been argued here that the variety of different ideas about language and culture which gathered on the intellectual field of English education during this period, while contributing to important educational innovations, also generated an enduring discord and confusion within and around English education. In the attempts to weld together the arguments that were articulated by some of the important actors within the field, political and other instrumental concerns sometimes overshadowed the ideas that informed individual positions, and for this and other reasons, the ideas and underlying concepts were not adequately explored.

This thesis, in attempting to illuminate this moment, has not been concerned with exploring the underlying social conditions that led to these events, although these have been touched upon in passing. The primary aim of this thesis has been to provide a synchronic account of the various and complex intellectual strands that appeared in English education in the 1960s and 1970s period. It has attempted to unravel some of the main arguments that were present and which took shape in the form of debates over language and culture. It has also sought, however, to look at these same arguments diachronically; to examine the history of their origins in the philosophy of language in an attempt to see how far contemporary confusions might be clarified through an examination of their early history. The following points summarise some of the clarifications of the confusions and

contradictions that were generated in the language and culture debates that this thesis has attempted.

With respect to Leavis and literary criticism, it was shown that the political context created the will for relativist arguments to be used opportunistically in order to articulate the charge of elitism and to instigate a willful overreading of its implications. The development of a view of aesthetic criticism as a dialogic communicative practice across diverse interpretive horizons, however, suggests the possibility of breaking through the relativist/incommensurability thesis.

Britton's emphasis on creativity and Bernstein's recognition of constraints on the generation and patternings of meanings established an apparent distinction in English education between culturally-dislocated and culturally-located individuals. The social/linguistic perspective developed in this thesis suggests that creativity and constraint with respect to cognition have to be and can be taken together without contradiction.

The relationship between language, culture and thought has been considered through the intellectual line traced from Herder and von Humboldt to Whorf, Chomsky and Bernstein in an attempt to rescue the mind in relation to the 'social.' Hallidayan sociolinguistics has been characterised as a contrast to theories of language and culture which link the social to the cognitive in all its cultural variants. The significance of these contrastive theories to the elaboration of concepts of culture within English education has also been considered.

It is evident from the discussion of Herder above that, while his concern for ethnicity and the integrity of ethnicity has been taken as support for the relativist/incommensurability thesis, claims of this kind are not fully supported in his writings. Herder's understanding of

language and culture as activities of evolution and synthesis suggests the possibility of a 'unity in diversity' within multi-cultural realities.

There were two relevant and inter-related losses that resulted from the confusion of the 1960s and 1970s. These were: an inadequate account of the social dimension of language and cognition and a denial of the relevance of critical engagement with aesthetic experience in transforming consciousness. Based on a view of language and culture that links the social to the cognitive, this thesis has argued for a view of aesthetic experience as a communicative practice capable of transforming cognitive interpretations and permitting individuals to develop new perspectives, drawing from their conventionalised modes of thought. Within this conceptualisation, aesthetic criticism is viewed not as a discussion aimed at demonstrating truth by discrediting or denying an-other's position, but as a conversation that serves as an end in itself.

The practice of learning to dialogue across difference is of fundamental importance within multicultural societies seeking to develop simultaneously a politics of unity and, to use Charles Taylor's phrase, a 'politics of recognition' (see Taylor, 1994). The claim made for dialogue in this thesis, and for a 'unity in diversity' within multiculturalist societies, does not assume a juxtaposition of several intact cultures or their assimilation into one common culture, in which the particularities of individual cultures are dissolved. It is a claim for dialogue *across* difference *about* difference that acknowledges the complexities of relation between cultural interpenetration and conservation. The principle aim of such a dialogue is not to eradicate difference or even to promote a 'healthy tolerance' toward diversity, but to extend the discourse and practice of social life. This is not a

denial of the 'politics' of cultural appropriation—of the way that power and domination work to silence and subjugate cultured individuals and individual cultures (Spivak, 1988; Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1989; hooks, 1990; West, 1993; Goldberg, 1994), nor is it an attempt to do what Cuban-American performance artist Coco Fusco warns against—to conflate 'hybridity' with 'parity,'

Appropriation cannot be reduced to what happens once something identifiable is removed from the place it previously occupied. Cultural appropriation is as much a political act as it is a formal operation or linguistic game. It involves taking *something*, often from someone, and it is rarely an isolated gesture (Fusco, 1995: 71).

This thesis argues that any effective critical and interpretive vocabulary which interrogates processes of cultural appropriation must recognise that cultural identities, including those of subaltern groups, are constituted in dialogue with a range of others—and that all acts and contacts involving cultural appropriation must be viewed as part of a dialectical movement of history and of political processes. That these processes involve individuals and cultures made up of divergent or even competing sets of values, beliefs and practices does not lead to the inevitable conclusion of incommensurability, however, but to the continuation of the 'quest for commensurability' which this thesis has begun.

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